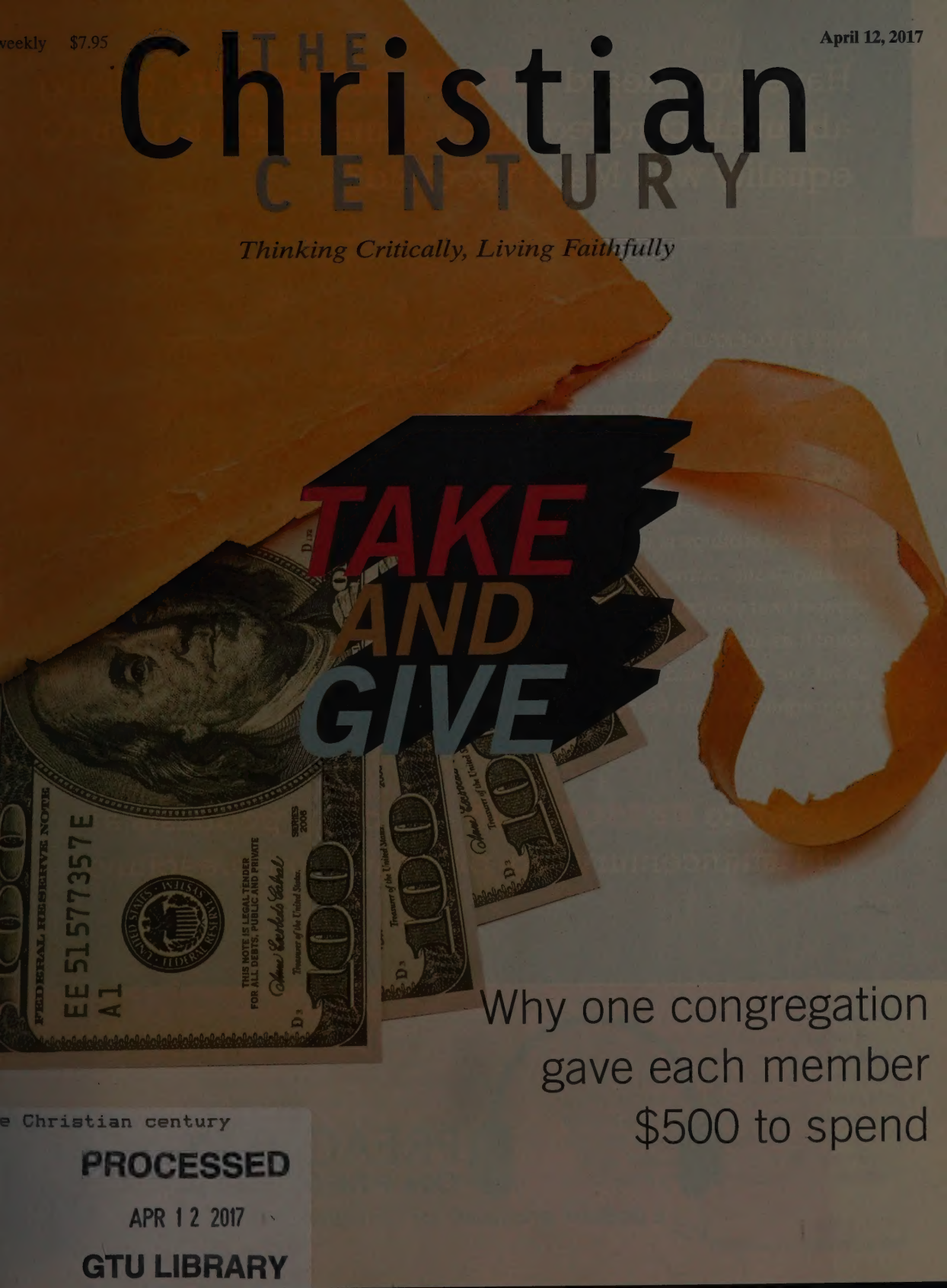


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April 12, 2017

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully



**TAKE
AND
GIVE**

Why one congregation
gave each member
\$500 to spend

Christian century

PROCESSED

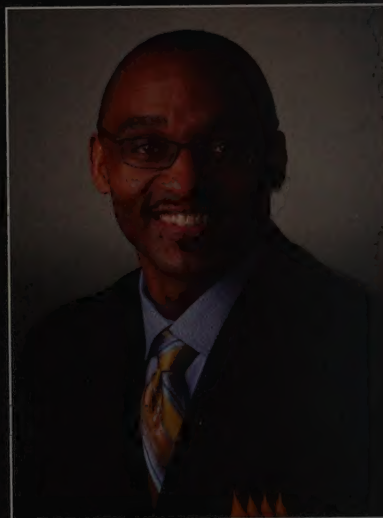
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Have you heard **BRAD BRAXTON** talking about his congregation's commitment to LGBTQ equality with Matt Fitzgerald?

MATT FITZGERALD: You've been one of the most outspoken black church leaders on LGBTQ equality. How has your work affected your own congregation?

BRAD BRAXTON: The work has been a blessing. The clarity of witness and the commitment to welcome all of our sacred siblings is what it means to be a community bearing Jesus' name. It's when you blow such a clear trumpet that you approximate what Jesus was doing. So I count it as all joy. But to be candid, if we *weren't* so clear about the moral and civic equality of gay people, our congregation would be two to three times larger.

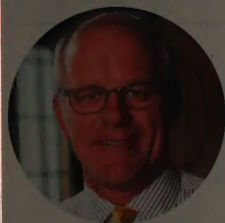


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**PREACHERS
ON PREACHING**

a podcast produced for christiancentury.org



From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

Prayer without answers

Does prayer work? That's the question many people ask when they perceive that God is not answering their prayers. Other questions surface too. Is prayer worthwhile? Does it change anything? Am I talking to myself? Does God care about my prayers?

I propose that we radically alter the way we talk about prayer by eliminating the use of the word *answer* from our references to prayer outcomes. The word doesn't fit well conceptually, and it encourages an interpretation of prayer that leans heavily toward self-interest. Prayer is not mostly about us.

At its most fundamental level, prayer is conversation with God, and conversations aren't about answers. They engage a relationship. They involve give-and-take and the sharing of company. Deep conversations inspire curiosity and promote discovery. They foster honesty.

Some people suggest that the first purpose of prayer is to know God. I rather think it is to enjoy God. Prayer is really no more complicated than picking up on a relationship already in progress. Robert Farrar Capon put it memorably: "Prayer is just talking to someone who is already talking to you. [It's] listening to someone who is already listening to you."

In this issue, Jeffrey Weiss and Jason Micheli raise penetrating questions as they evaluate the role of prayer (see p. 12). Since both of them live with serious cancer, there is a gravity and immediacy to their writing. Neither one appears to obsess over his compromised health, which is a refreshing sign of broad perspective. I often

think God's primary role must be larger than just managing our health. That's why personal and communal prayers that implicitly treat illness as an injustice of God or consider robust health as a right are misguided. Mortality is not an offense. It's actually part of the deal that comes with being human.

Once we discover that the greatest benefit of prayer is intimacy with God, the fostered relationship becomes deeper than one that's organized around having our desires met. The more persistently we hang in there with prayer, the more we encounter a God who does not provide an answer to our every want, but who offers strength for our every need. Requests certainly have their place in honest prayer. "Let your requests be made known to God," writes the apostle Paul. But we shouldn't confuse the value of supplicating prayer with a recitation of personal wants.

In the end prayer is about putting away our quest for answers long enough to enjoy the Lord in an unencumbered way. Here is where Anna comes to mind. She was a parishioner of mine in Kansas City who was terminally ill. Sometimes when I visited her in the hospital, she prayed; at other times I took the lead. Even though Anna's voice and body weakened as the weeks passed, her eyes retained their glow and her mind its spark. "Pastor," she said to me one day, "I don't see myself getting better. How about we skip the prayer for healing today? I just want you to pray for the Lord not to leave me. That's all I need now—the close company of God."

Anna Johnson died 25 years ago. Her rich prayer instincts continue to school my love for God.

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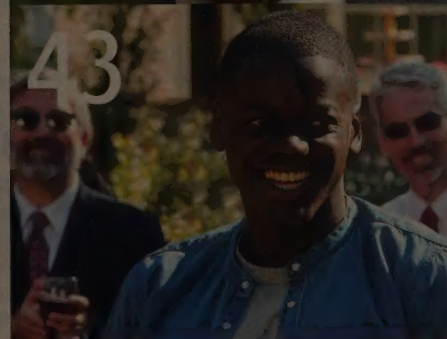
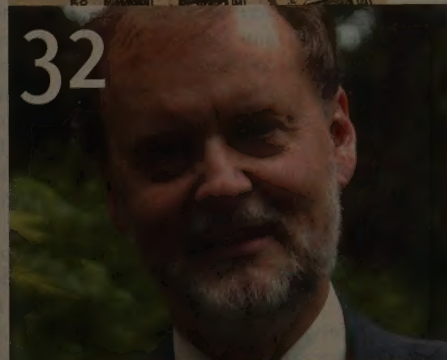
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Luther and the Jews

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson is to be commended for her fair and thoughtful article “Still reckoning with Luther” (March 15). While the debate will go on with respect to whether Martin Luther was anti-Judaic or anti-Semitic, it is important to know that in 1994 the Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community was adopted by that body’s Church Council. In a single page it expressed both shame and sadness regarding elements in the legacy of Luther and the resultant suffering of Jews in places “where the Lutheran Churches were strongly represented” during the Nazi era.

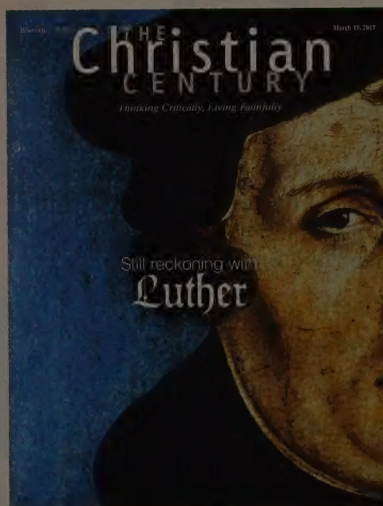
The document goes on to address the compelling need to acknowledge Luther’s “anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations” against the Jews in his writings of his later years. As the statement notes, very few Christian communities of faith were able “to escape the contagion of anti-Judaism and its modern successor, anti-Semitism.”

Many within Germany have acknowledged with remorse their role during those years. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is to be praised for being one of the most forthright religious bodies in its strong voice of sorrow, recognizing that anti-Semitism is always “a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel.”

Peggy Obrecht
Northampton, Pa.

Wilson’s article was clarifying and edifying. Yet I believe that one great stumbling block to a new perception of Luther’s meaning is embodied in the terms “Old” and “New” Testament. In fact, the first is in no way “old.” It is and always will be the original Testament, the telling of the original covenant between God and humanity. It is in effect always and in no way supplanted by the “new.”

Reine Abele
Concord, N.H.



For me, the pertinent question is not “Is the Reformation over?” but “Do we need a second Reformation?” I think we badly need a second Reformation with as strong an emphasis on justice—a sabbatical/jubilee type of justice—as the first Reformation gave to justification by faith.

The first Reformation highlighted Jesus Christ, the cross, resurrection, justification by faith, not by works. Good, but not biblically complete. The second Reformation needs to add the kingdom of God, love and justice, jubilee justice that releases the oppressed.

Lowell Noble
Riceville, Iowa

The Johnson Amendment . . .

Douglas Laycock’s expertise in religious liberty law is unmatched. Yet I believe his proposal to fix the Johnson Amendment (“Free speech in the pulpit,” March 15) is terribly misguided. Laycock’s remedy (to continue the prohibition on spending money supporting candidates, yet allow pastors to endorse candidates in sermons) is a solution in search of a problem.

Laycock reasons that because political spending costs money, we must continue to prohibit churches and nonprofits from spending their tax-exempt dollars in this manner. However, because sermons cost no money, he contends, pastors should be allowed to endorse candidates from the pulpit.

He is correct that sermons do not cost money. But opening the pulpit to electioneering costs something far more precious—church fellowship and unity. Churches have fought over such consequential matters as the color of the carpet in the church parlor. Can you imagine if we put political endorsements to a church vote? In my politically diverse congregation, I might as well shut the doors.

Laycock believes his proposal makes for good public policy. But it is poor church theology.

Daniel Glaze
Richmond, Va.

Deadly husbands . . .

I am offended that you quoted a *New York Times* article that stated, “With their access to firearms, husbands in America are far more deadly than Islamic terrorists” (CenturyMarks, March 15). One hundred percent of said terrorists plan to murder. The fact that the United States has done a fine job keeping terrorists at bay does not make them less deadly than husbands. Leave it to the *New York Times* to use only numbers that suit their needs.

I also wonder whether Adam Hearlson’s media review in that issue (“Vulgar prophecies”) was a cheap attempt to get more millennials to read your magazine. His sad attempt to make us believe that the lyrics of the duo Run the Jewels are deeply insightful only bolstered my belief that rappers—like Donald Trump—don’t know when to bite their tongue.

Matthew Dennison
North East, Pa.

April 12, 2017

Does school choice help?

The movement for school choice has a champion in the White House and in education secretary Betsy DeVos. President Trump wants to spend \$20 billion on expanding charter schools and voucher programs to provide alternatives to what he deems a failed public system. DeVos has spent her career—and much of her own money—trying to redirect tax dollars from public schools into privately managed charter schools or tuition vouchers that can be used at private institutions. DeVos prizes the private education she received at Christian Reformed schools and wants others to benefit from a similar experience.

Yet several decades of experiment with charters and vouchers have not produced resounding success stories. The record of charter schools in DeVos's home state of Michigan offers a cautionary tale, one that has been repeated in other states. An investigation by the *Detroit Free Press* found that Michigan taxpayers poured nearly \$1 billion a year into charter schools with no oversight over how the money was spent or who was doing the teaching at those schools. The *Free Press* found instances of financial fraud and of schools being allowed to operate for years despite a poor record of achievement. Charter schools gave Michigan students more choices, but their choices were generally no better than the ones they had before.

Nor have vouchers lived up to their promise. In Milwaukee, for example, home of the nation's longest-running experiment with a voucher program, academic performance in voucher-funded private schools is generally about the same as in public schools. Studies of programs in Ohio and Louisiana found that students using vouchers actually did worse than public school students.

None of this is to say there are no outstanding charter schools or voucher-funded private schools. And there are states, such as Massachusetts, and cities, such as Washington, D.C., where parents say that a tightly regulated system of charter schools has enriched opportunities alongside the public system.

But nowhere is there demonstrative evidence that the mechanisms of market choice and privatization have improved education overall. Their downside, however, is quite clear: wherever charters and vouchers operate, they siphon money

from the public school systems which are charged with educating every student, regardless of physical or mental ability, income, or parental involvement.

The schools that have demonstrated real reform in recent years are ones that have focused over the long haul on the unglamorous tasks of setting high goals, finding and supporting excellent principals, continually supporting and training teachers, and staying connected to parents and community. Supporting public schools in that hard work is the best focus for government dollars.

Charters and vouchers siphon money from public schools.

CENTURY marks

ROAD TRIP: Stranded by a snowstorm last month, two Texas congressmen, Republican Will Hurd and Democrat Beto O'Rourke, decided to drive a rental car together on the 1,600-mile trek back to Washington. Along the way, they discussed health care and other policy issues, and they decided that they have more in common than they had realized. They used Facebook to engage constituents in their discussions, and even called congressional colleagues to get them in on their conversations (NPR, March 15).

HURTING SOULS: The Community of Love Christian Fellowship in Boston ministers to people who have been

wounded by other churches because of gender or sexual bias or acts of sexual abuse. One member calls Community of Love a hospital for wounded souls. Emmett Price, the pastor, says the healing process for many in his congregation is slow. He says he cries when some are finally able to call him pastor. Within a five-month period, *Publishers Weekly* featured books titled *Wounded in the Church* and *Hurting in the Church*, which deal with the kind of people Pastor Price is trying to reach (*Washington Post*, March 8).

DEMONIC: Pope Francis is urging priests who hear confessions of troubled souls to call on the services of an exorcist.

An exorcist could be useful in dealing with a variety of spiritual disorders, he said, some of which could have a supernatural source. Pope Francis has mentioned the devil more frequently than his predecessors, and he refers to the devil as a physical presence in the world. The pope has likened priests who sexually abuse children to those participating in a satanic mass (*Guardian*, March 17).

OVERDUE: Fanny Mendelssohn was overshadowed during her lifetime by her composer-pianist brother Felix. Some of her own compositions were published under her brother's name. Her Easter Sonata was considered too masculine for a female composer. But the sonata has been confirmed as Fanny's work, thanks to the detective work of an American scholar, and in honor of Fanny the piece was broadcast by the BBC on International Women's Day (*Telegraph*, March 4).

GOOD NEWS STORY: A bus attack in northern Kenya during which Muslims shielded Christians from al-Shabaab militants is the subject of a film. *Watu Wote* (Swahili for "All of us") is based on the ambush of a Manderu bus in December 2015 in which gunmen sprayed the bus with bullets, killing two passengers. When the terrorists asked the 62 Muslims to identify the Christian passengers, the Muslims refused, telling the militants to kill everyone or leave. It is hoped the film, shot by three German students, will improve Muslim-Christian relations in Kenya and help change the widespread view that Muslims are terrorists (RNS).

PEACE SIGN: Hanan al-Hroub, a primary schoolteacher in the West



S PAULDING

"If push comes to shove, I bet you could do some damage with a plowshare."

Bank, was awarded the second annual Global Teacher Prize, which comes with a prize of \$1 million. A Palestinian who grew up in a refugee camp in Bethlehem, she competed against 8,000 contestants and nine other finalists from around the world. She will use the money to establish scholarships to encourage students to go into education. Al-Hroub is known for teaching nonviolence to children and for helping students cope with trauma (AP).

UNMOORED? Since 1990 the number of white Republicans with no religious affiliation has tripled. White working-class men with only nominal ties to a Protestant church have a hard time holding down a job, getting and remaining married, and making ties in the community. Peter Beinart argues that the decline in religious attachment among white conservatives breeds pessimism and discontent and helps account for the election of Donald Trump. Religiously unaffiliated liberals fueled Bernie Sanders's campaign. People without church affiliation tend to find a greater sense of identity in nation and ethnicity, making them less tolerant toward immigrants (*Atlantic*, April).

LONELY MEN: As men age, they tend to let friendships lapse, which is hazardous to their health. The biggest threat middle-aged men face is not obesity or smoking, but loneliness. Loneliness can contribute to cardiovascular disease and strokes and lead to Alzheimer's. People are reluctant to admit to doctors or counselors that they're lonely. Unlike women, men tend to need a shared activity to bond with other men. The best solution for men is to have a regular activity, such as a weekly bowling night or golf outing with friends (*Boston Globe Magazine*, March 9).

TOP TEN: The top universities in the world for theology and religious studies are Harvard, Oxford, Durham, Cambridge, Boston College, Yale, Free University of Amsterdam, Duke, and (tied for ninth) Catholic University of

“Climate change is impacting stability in areas of the world where our troops are operating today.”

— Secretary of Defense **James Mattis**, in written testimony to members of the Senate Armed Services Committee (ProPublica, March 26)

“Democracy dies in darkness.”

— New slogan of the *Washington Post* (*The Christian Science Monitor*, March 6)

“If you don't want refugees, stop creating them.”

— **Yemeni-American Raabyaah Althaibani**, speaking about America's role in the war in Yemen. Her husband is seeking a visa to come to America that could be rejected because of President Trump's revised travel ban (*Time*, March 20).

Leuven and Princeton. Due to lack of enrollment, the University of California, Berkeley, decided to drop its religious studies program (*Guardian*, March 8; *Daily Californian*, March 5).

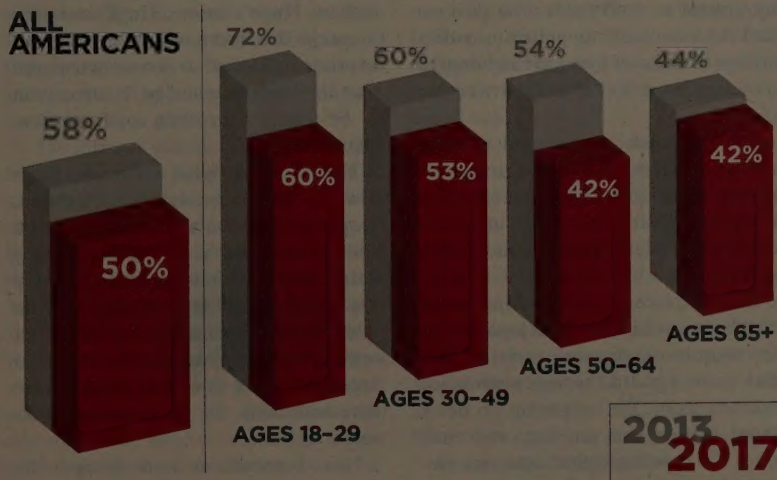
PARTIAL SUCCESS: Worldwide, the number of children living with HIV has dropped from 290,000 in 2010 to 150,000 in 2015. The decline in the number of children with HIV is much sharp-

er in high-income countries. Of new childhood cases, 73 percent come from 21 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Poor countries lack access to the antiviral drug zidovudine, known also as AZT, which greatly reduces the transmission of HIV from mother to baby. In 2015 fewer than 100 babies in the United States were diagnosed with HIV due to HIV-positive mothers taking AZT while pregnant (*Time*, March 16).

TOO JUDGMENTAL?

SOURCE: PRI

Percentage of people who agree that religious groups are **driving young people away** by being too judgmental about gay and lesbian issues



My nephew's furlough from prison

Guest of honor

by Heidi Neumark

I'M AN ONLY CHILD, while my husband, Gregorio, is one of 12 children. We decided to compromise and have two children. They have no cousins here in the United States, but in Argentina, where my husband is from, they have dozens.

So last summer we flew to Buenos Aires to spend time with family.

Every day we left our hotel in the city—with its grand avenues, gorgeous 19th-century architecture, and chic stores—and drove until we hit the rutted dirt roads where our family members live. We always knew we were close to their homes when our eyes began to

braced our daughter's wife as one of the family.

Makeshift outdoor tables were set up to seat a crowd of 40 to 50 people. Hopeful dogs and hungry children hung around the fire waiting for the first tastes. At last platters of green salad, potato salad, and bread were brought out, heralding the main attraction—meat hot from the grill. After eating it was time for soccer. One advantage to such a big family is that every group we visited could field several teams and a large cheering section. The games would take place right where we were, in a dusty yard or a short walk away.

Claudio was not the son who had made good, but he was the one who was being lavished with love.

water and our lungs began sucking in smoke from the piles of burning trash that appear on every side. The government does not feel compelled to collect garbage in these outlying areas, home to many who work to keep the city center polished.

But the stink of polluted air was quickly overcome with the aromas of grilling beef, chicken, and chorizo sausages as various family members hosted us at one celebratory meal after another.

At each place it was the same—hugs and kisses, joyful tears, and *yerba maté*, the ubiquitous Argentinean tea you drink from a gourd through a silver (or silverish) straw. We caught up on news, shared stories and pictures, and took selfies. I was relieved that everyone em-

This was the pattern every day until the day we were heading out to our nephew Hugo's home. Hugo had told Gregorio that there would be a special surprise, and as we drove we wondered what the surprise could be. It turned out to be Hugo's brother, our nephew, Claudio.

Until then we were the main attraction at these feasts. My husband, Gregorio, is the son who made good, the golden boy living in New York, the city of dreams. I know members of his family don't understand how money can be tight for us citizens on an island of wealth and why we can't all fly to Argentina every year. But when we are there with them, the joy of reunion outweighs all else.

Now, however, we were going to be

upstaged and the spotlight would shine on Claudio. I saw people hugging him repeatedly, patting him with love, stroking his face, kissing him, and making sure his plate was loaded with food and his glass filled. Why this special attention for Claudio?

Claudio was not a son who made good. He was home on a visit from prison, where he's serving a sentence for a murder that happened when he was 20. He may or may not have killed in self-defense. He may or may not have taken the full burden of guilt to spare his younger brother, who was with him that night. The details of the event were unimportant during this visit.

His seven-year sentence would be over in a few months. In Argentina, an inmate in his final year of prison gets to go home on monthly visits. The first visit is for 12 hours, the second for 36 hours, and the next for 48 hours. Claudio had scheduled his two-day visit to coincide with our time there.

These visits are unaccompanied. The inmate is expected to get back to prison on time, on his own. If he doesn't, his sentence is extended. That's enough of a deterrent to make the policy work. The visits help people reconnect with family on the outside and adjust to life after incarceration. This approach makes sense and shows that prison reform is possible. I remember living in Argentina under a dictatorship, when a sentence to prison meant that you disappeared at the

Heidi Neumark is pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in New York City and author of Hidden Inheritance: Family Secrets, Memory, and Faith.

bottom of the ocean. I was deeply impressed by this change.

I was even more impressed by the community gathered around my nephew, a group that seemed to have emerged straight from a parable of Jesus. Two people were missing eyes, one due to a fight and one due to untreated diabetes. One person needed a cane to walk, while another sat in a

rickety, homemade wheelchair. We were seated at the table with "the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind," and the burnished place of honor belonged to Claudio.

Prison has changed Claudio. He is no longer the cheerful, outgoing, funny boy I remember from a previous visit. He is withdrawn and traumatized—so our family told me as they lavished him with

love. When I asked Claudio about his experience inside, he didn't want to discuss it. "I'm surviving," was all that he said. And then, lifting up his downcast eyes at the people around him, he said, "This is what matters."

This is what matters at the cross, where the last become first, the margins become the center, and we are all made good through the grace of God. **CC**

For those of you just tuning in

BY BRIAN DOYLE

YOU CAN GO to a baseball game and sit in the stands, and you can watch it on television, and you can now watch it on a small electric toy in your hand, or have your toy chirp the game to you, but you can also still blessedly listen to baseball on the radio, which seems to me the most pleasant, apt, relaxed, and gracious way to savor a baseball game. I mean, it's great to be at a game, although the lower the league and the sparser the assembly the better, I think, but baseball on the radio can be a mysteriously joyful experience.

The quiet mutter of the announcer among the many slow moments of the game; the occasional wandering rambling anecdote that takes up a whole pitching change; the lovely plethora of tiny details on the batter ("from lovely Galt, Iowa, population 32!") and the pitcher ("once pitched two innings of relief for the Wichita Wingnuts with his other arm and only gave up one hit, and that a dribbler!") and the catcher ("spent two years as a logger in Kitimat, British Columbia, and recently donated bats for the entire Little League there!") and the home-plate umpire ("a renowned Hindu scholar in the off-season!") and the

teams' long colorful pained entertaining histories. The satisfying whap of a pitch landing in the catcher's mitt, a familiar sound, a sound you have heard since you were five years old, but here it is on the radio, as you drive along trying to discern between the foomp of a fastball and the thwick of a slider. The firm inarguable sound of the bat driving the ball somewhere, and the only way you can tell it's a homer is by the rising thunder of the crowd and the rising excitement in the announcer's voice; and bless the announcer who does not try for a signature call, a trademark, a hallmark, a catchphrase, but simply unadornedly shouts back back back gone!

The faraway rumble and thrum of the crowd like waterfall two bends downstream. The sometimes incisive remarks of the second announcer, often a former ballplayer who, if you are lucky, is the sort of quietly observant fellow who notes subtle fielding shifts before the pitch, and the exact length of a base runner's lead, and what pitch he stole on, and (if you are luckier than lucky) gently notes the scoring arithmetic, for those ancients among us who keep score, or kept score, and care about the alluring poem of

something like 8-4-5-3, a very alert play by the third baseman. The insipid commercials, most of which you switch off hurriedly, but here and there one makes you grin at its wit or simplicity ("Thor's Toyota—we have cars!"). The warm silence the announcers let grow between themselves; they are comfortable with it, they know whose turn is next, they know not to tread on the other guy's territory and time. The way the lead announcer will be sure to mention the inning and the score and the dramatic plays that caused or influenced the score every few minutes for those of you just tuning in. The phrase for those of you just tuning in, which seems so wonderfully polite to me, so courteous, so welcoming, so communally open, so uncommercial, so summery, so nakedly unassumingly human, so essentially American. There is no audience demographic in it, no market niche, no politics, no religion, no arrogance, no lecture or sermon or snark, just a friendly hey to the man or woman or boy or girl who just walked into the house of the broadcast.

There have been many days when I was wan and weary of conflict and shout, of sneer and snide, or cold and cruel, and I turn on the game, and the announcer says For those of you just tuning in, and I feel cleaner and taller and holier and happier about the deep generous character of my country, the wild bright dream of it, its cheerful refusal to acquiesce to those who would shut the door of the house. **CC**

Brian Doyle is editor of Portland magazine. He recently wrote Chicago: A Novel.

My doubts about prayer

by Jeffrey Weiss

SINCE I WENT public about my brain cancer a couple of months ago, I've had many people of many faiths offer prayers for me. Some said they were hoping to nudge the Almighty to heal me.

I appreciate every such message. After all, glioblastoma is tough. The median survival rate is only a few months more than a year. Maybe my friends could offer God some reasons to boost my survival odds?

But I've been a reporter for a long time. I chew on any such broad claim, thinking about whether there are valid rebuttals.

So for me this has been a wry reminder of what I've read in the book of Job, a rollicking narrative that includes colorful settings, sarcastic arguments, and an answer that turns away from a lot of Jewish and Christian traditions.

Jeffrey Weiss writes a column for Religion News Service, My Way to the Egress, where this essay first appeared.

Job is a pious and wealthy guy with a big family who has done many good things for other people. One day, God points out what a great and good fellow Job is to one of his divine subordinates.

"Ha satan" is not like the Satan in other faith traditions. He's an adversary, yes, but something like a prosecuting attorney. There's zero hint of him being evil or supervising an eternal hell. This Satan tells God that Job may be doing the right things only because he's so comfortable.

God, who doesn't respond that divine omniscience means always winning a bet, gives ha satan permission to test Job by whacking his wealth, killing a lot of his family, and ruining his health.

Job never blasphemes in response. Not even once. Some of his friends show up to discuss what's going on. They insist Job surely did something wrong to deserve God's imposition of suffering.

Nope, says Job, who also points out that not only do some other good people suffer, but some nasty people live happily

and well. He wants God to explain why. But God's response is almost no answer.

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do good things happen to bad people? God lists the many divine deeds that people can't possibly fathom. Don't bother arguing, God basically says, because you can't possibly understand how God sees what's happening.

At the very end, God tells Job's buddies that they said all kinds of false things to justify why Job had suffered. And God gives Job back his wealth and comfort. He dies at age 140, "old and contented."

Job makes a worthy point, no matter one's specific theological beliefs: Job says he does what's right because it's right, not because he expects a reward. I've tried to follow that and will keep trying on my way to the Egress.

I'm totally grateful for the support some friends are giving me. But does God care about such prayers? I think the book of Job says even those who believe in the Almighty 100 percent can't necessarily figure out what God might be doing or why. So in addition to the gratitude, I'll hold onto a smidge of hope that I might also die "old and contented."

Woman, behold your son

So much my son, I think on in the night.
You are beloved. I've hidden fearful words
In my heart. Some, double-edged as swords
Inscribing silver arcs through morning light,
Can pierce the midday dark. I knew delight
At the angel's voice, but when the Spirit stirred,
I was as water tossed by wind. That Word
In me became our risen Son of Light.

My sorrow would be risen too, but oh,
The awful joy that finds its hope in grief
Is joy that shatters me. My given son,
Upon that heaving sea, when he was slow
To waken, what shored your disbelief?
Shore now my hope, my world is still undone.

John Leax

God prays in us

by Jason Micheli

JEFFREY WEISS might expect a clergyman to critique his appraisal of the book of Job and to argue that "prayer works," as I heard from a TSA agent who recently squinted at the disparity between the precancer face on my ID and the one in the flesh before her. "I'll pray for you to be healed," she whispered as she checked my boarding pass.

... when you are terminally ill

But with a terminal cancer of my own—mine's in my marrow, as voracious as it is rare—I would tell Mr. Weiss this: I think you're exactly right to point out how the book of Job reveals the theological problem in how we often speak of prayer. God is incomprehensible. As God says to Job, everything that is did not have to be—a reminder woven into the opening line of scripture, "In the beginning..." We are, Job learns, contingent creatures. Our knowledge can never bridge the gap between us and our Creator. If this is true, you're exactly right to caution against the way we speak of prayer working.

To put it more bluntly: Isn't it ridiculous (and maybe even idolatrous) to think that through our supplications we can persuade God into doing something God might otherwise not do? You might be surprised to hear that I take it as self-evident that the answer to that question is yes.

The God of Job isn't a god we can manipulate—by spiritually sanctioned means—to do what we want. Too often when people tell me they'll pray for me, the implication left unsaid is that God is otherwise not already with me or at work in me and that if I'm not healed then somehow their prayers didn't work. Such an understanding of prayer is incompatible with the God of the book of Job, a God who is at every moment the reason there is something instead of nothing.

Not only do I agree with you, Mr. Weiss, I think St. Paul would too. After stating the obvious (none of us knows how to pray), St. Paul writes to the Romans that whenever we pray, no matter what it might look like, it's not actually we who are praying. Rather God, the Spirit, prays in us and through us.

This is what gets missed by so many of

the people who tell me they're praying for me. Prayer isn't something we do. It's something God does.

Instead of a practice we perform for results we've predetermined, when we pray to God, we're prayed in by God. God is the impetus behind our prayers as much as the object of them. The very wants and desires we pray, runs St. Paul's argument, are themselves the handiwork of the ever-present God.

What's this mean when you're sick with stage-serious cancer and staring at the-house-always-wins odds? St. Thomas Aquinas doubles down on Paul's point when he argues, as Herbert McCabe paraphrases it, that "we should not say: 'In accordance with my prayer: God wills that it should be a fine day'; we should say: 'God wills: that it should be a fine day in accordance with my prayer.'" God wills our prayers as much as God wills the fine day.

Let me put the point a bit more personally for the both of us. We should not say, "In accordance with the TSA agent's prayer, God wills that I should be healed of my cancer." We should say, "God wills that I should be healed of my cancer, in accordance with her prayer."

That's no guarantee I'll be healed, and if I'm not healed, there's no explanation behind it of the sort Job's friends assumed. However, it is a guarantee that my desire to be healed, as well as the desire of all those praying for me, isn't our desire alone or even originally. It's a desire shared by—initiated by—the God who prays in us.

You're dead-on that as contingent creatures we can never know the why behind the Creator's doings. If we could, then God would not be God.

But as to your other suggestion, that God does not care about your friends' prayers, I disagree. Not only does God care about your friends' prayers, their prayers derive from and originate in God. Indeed, it's not strong enough to say God cares about your friends' prayers. Their prayers are, in fact, a sign—a sacrament, as we say in the church—of God's love for you. **CC**

Thinking about the wood for the Easter fire

The ground is damp beneath the stand of trees and dampness penetrates my winter shoes. I choose from fallen branches, piece by piece, mere sticks that cannot know their privileged use.

Just sticks—such humble things always remain docile to nature's processes—this wood will dry now, warmed and sheltered from the rain, and all inclemency of sky that could delay its transformation into fuel for Easter Vigil's sacred rite of fire. On wood did life and death engage to duel: prodigious combat then, soon blazing pyre.

But now, just sticks, they hold no life, no power. They wait to burn for Christ and share his hour.

Sister Johanna Caton

Jason Micheli is a pastor at Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, and the author of *Cancer Is Funny: Keeping Faith in Stage-Serious Chemo* (Fortress).

New travel ban still anti-Muslim, critics charge

In the eyes of critics, President Trump's executive order on travel to the United States by refugees and nationals of six Muslim-majority countries is still an unconstitutional Muslim ban.

The new order was scheduled to take effect March 16 but was stopped by two federal judges.

U.S. District Judge Derrick Watson of Hawaii commented in his ruling that "a reasonable, objective observer . . . would conclude that the executive order was issued with a purpose to disfavor a particular religion."

The new executive action exempts U.S. green-card holders and other foreigners in possession of a valid visa, and it no longer singles out Syrians for indefinite suspension from entry.

The revised order also allows immigration officials to issue visas to individuals from the six temporarily banned countries on a case-by-case basis, for example, for students and work visa holders or children and individuals requiring urgent medical care.

In addition, the new order no longer prioritizes the resettlement of religious minorities—Christians, by and large—from the six Muslim-majority countries. That prioritization was one of the key features of the original order.

"This is not a Muslim ban in any way, shape, or form," a senior Department of Homeland Security official said, citing as proof the fact that the ban does not affect the vast majority of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims.

Some say the revised travel order would still be counterproductive because it would raise tensions with Muslim countries whether or not they are affected by the ban, while playing into the propaganda efforts of terrorists. [Others have pointed to the executive order's

request for a report on the number of honor killings carried out in the United States by "foreign nationals" as stoking stereotypical views of Muslims. Scholars consider honor killings, a form of violence against women, as stemming from cultural rather than religious norms.]

The six countries included in the 90-day travel ban are Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Officials said Iraq was dropped from the list of countries subject to a 90-day travel ban because of its strides in recent weeks to address shortcomings in citizens' documentation.

Like the original order, the new executive action suspends the refugee resettlement program for 120 days, while

reducing the number of refugees to be accepted by the United States this fiscal year from 110,000, as set by President Obama last year, to 50,000. Trump administration officials say that about 35,000 refugees have already been admitted since the beginning of the fiscal year in October.

Implementing the revised immigration order could be as problematic as the previous one, which was suspended by a federal judge in February. That suspension was subsequently upheld by a federal court of appeals.

After Trump's initial order was halted by federal courts, support for the ban began to wane among most religious



WELCOME THREATENED: A woman at the Kakuma Refugee Camp in rural Kenya, whose name is not given for privacy reasons, attends classes through Church World Service to learn basic language, hygiene, and communication skills. Almost all of the camp's refugees are from Somalia, one of the countries targeted by the president's travel ban and suspension of refugee resettlement. Church World Service joined with the National Council of Churches to launch a grassroots campaign to safeguard the welcome of refugees in the United States and to rescind the Trump administration's antimigrant policies.

PHOTO BY ANNIE GRIFFITHS, CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

groups, according to a survey by the Public Religion Research Institute. Support from Catholics, mainline Protestants, and religious minorities dropped. Among white evangelicals, however, support increased.

Bob Roberts, pastor of the 3,000-member NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas, has grown concerned by what he sees as Islamophobia among fellow evangelical Christians.

"Evangelicals have mixed their faith with the state, making a kind of religious nationalism," said Roberts, who has worked with Muslim leaders around the world to foster interfaith fellowship. "They see it as 'taking back America,' as stopping the Muslims from taking over America."

For historians of religion, this wariness of outsiders in many ways goes back the country's early Puritan settlers.

"The notion of a nation with more visible Muslim communities doesn't comport with 'the city on a hill' or this notion that America is and always has been a Christian nation," said Randall Balmer of Dartmouth College. "And in some ways, this has happened once before."

During the period of industrialization near the turn of the 20th century, many Protestants reacted with alarm to the influx of Catholic, Jewish, and Eastern Orthodox immigrants.

"The response on the part of many evangelicals was to lapse into apocalyptic language and an interpretation that saw the country on the verge of collapse," Balmer said.

Today, 76 percent of white evangelicals approve of the temporary ban on refugees from the six countries, according to another recent survey by Pew Research. That compares with 50 percent of white mainline Protestants, 36 percent of Catholics of all races, and 10 percent of black Protestants, the survey found. Overall, about four in ten Americans currently approve of the controversial immigration ban.

Christian leaders, both evangelicals and others, many of them involved in overseas Christian ministries helping refugees in Muslim countries, have objected to the ban.

[Linda Hartke, president of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, said

in a statement that the new order "still prevents us from undertaking lifesaving work during the most critical time for refugees and displaced persons in human history."

On March 3, three days before the new order was signed, Church World Service and the National Council of Churches launched a campaign to safeguard the U.S. welcome of refugees.

"Refugee resettlement is one of the most cherished traditions upon which our country was founded and plays a critical role in U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy," the ecumenical declaration states.

Signers of the declaration, including mainline denominational leaders, noted that Church World Service has resettled refugees for more than 70 years.

The groups wrote that "it is imperative that we speak out against the notion that refugees are a threat to our safety—they are not." —Howard Lafranchi, Weston Williams, and Harry Bruinius, *The Christian Science Monitor*; information added from Religion News Service and the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff

Canadian Muslims face 'constant questioning' of whether they fit in society

Danyaal Raza, a family physician, was honored last year at the first-ever awards ceremony reserved for Muslim Canadians for his work in promoting better access to health care for vulnerable populations.

"It was a huge honor to be recognized by members of your own community for your contributions," he said. "At the same time, it saddens me that this is something Canadian Muslims need to do. It's a shame that if you are Muslim in Canada or the United States, you have to go out of your way to prove you are a good citizen."

Like Canadians of all faiths, Raza is struggling to come to terms with the lone-wolf terrorist attack on a Quebec City mosque late in January, which killed six people and injured 19.

The latest national census data shows Muslims make up about 3 percent of the

Canadian population, the largest religious minority. About one-third of Canadian Muslims told researchers for a recent survey by the Environics Institute that they have experienced discrimination because of their religion or ethnicity.

"We tend to think of ourselves as very diverse and very accepting, but there's a constant questioning of whether Muslims fit in Canadian society," says Ruba Ali al-Hassani, an Iraqi Canadian Ph.D. student.

She and a fellow student at York University in Toronto founded the Canadian Association of Muslim Women in Law, an advocacy and networking group, after her colleague was asked to leave the university's law library because she was wearing a hijab.

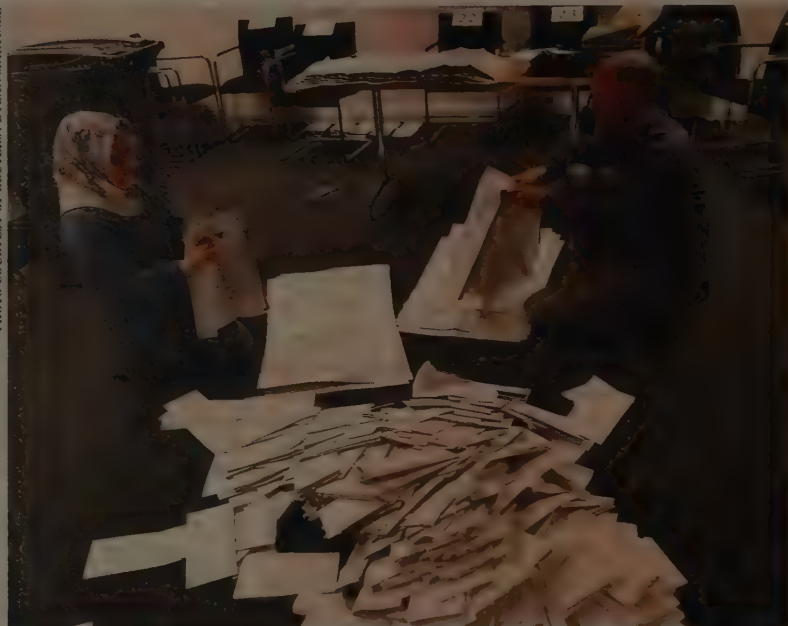
Former prime minister Stephen Harper implemented a series of laws considered by many to be anti-immigrant and especially anti-Muslim, including the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, which toughened laws against forced marriages and added polygamy to the criminal code. Kellie Leitch, a leading contender in upcoming elections to replace Harper as leader of the Conservative Party, has made implementing a test of Canadian values for immigrants a key part of her platform. —Anita Elash, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Dutch election highlights divisions about religion and immigration

Dutch Muslims are breathing a sigh of relief after the worse-than-expected performance by anti-Islam populist Geert Wilders in the mid-March election.

"We have trust in the future" of this traditionally welcoming country, said Rasit Bal of the Muslim government contact organization, an advocacy group for Muslims in the Netherlands, which feared that a victory by Wilders's PVV party would strengthen anti-immigrant sentiment in the Netherlands.

Gerard de Korte, bishop of s'Hertogenbosch, said the outcome shows that Dutch voters rejected Wilders's extreme



CLOSE CALL: Poll workers count ballots by hand—as required by authorities to prevent hacking of computer software—after polling stations closed in The Hague, Netherlands, on March 15. An anti-Islam populist who has been called the “Dutch Trump” received fewer votes than expected, but his party increased its share of the vote.

rhetoric, which included calls to close mosques and ban the Qur’an.

“From the view of Catholic teaching, that is positive,” he said. “His position is dangerous.”

At the same time, de Korte advocates paying attention to the questions that Wilders supporters ask: “For the other parties it is very important to take the questions of the voters seriously but give better answers, more in line with Christian social teaching. It is important for polarization to stop now.”

Wilders, who has been labeled the “Dutch Trump,” had called for sealing off the border to Muslim immigrants and making “the Netherlands great again.”

“All the values Europe stands for—freedom, democracy, human rights—are incompatible with Islam,” Wilders said in a 2015 video addressed to Turkish immigrants.

Despite the result for Wilders, his PVV party still increased its share of the vote to become the second-largest party in parliament, leaving many worried about its influence. Since the main-

stream parties have vowed to exclude Wilders from any ruling coalition, the PVV, which stands for the Party for Freedom, could become the key opposition force.

Binyomin Jacobs, president of the Rabbinical Council for the Netherlands and a representative of the country’s small Jewish population, said parts of Wilders’s main message were echoed in more moderate terms by the main parties, which took a harder line than usual on integration and immigration. So he still wonders: “What direction will the large majority go?”

On March 14, the day before the Dutch election, the Court of Justice of the European Union, which interprets EU law, issued a landmark judgment that upheld the right of private companies in EU member countries to enact policies barring employees from wearing “religious, political and philosophical signs” in the interest of “neutrality.”

Such visible signs range from Jewish kippahs to Sikh turbans and Hindu bindis; Christian crosses can perhaps remain hidden under clothing.

The court decision was a response to two legal cases, one from Belgium and the other in France, in which a Muslim woman was dismissed by her employer because of her headscarf.

In the Netherlands, Muslims make up approximately 6 percent of the total population of 17 million. Bal’s organization, which runs government-mandated Islamic education classes for Muslim children in public schools, encourages debate and discussion about cultural integration, especially among the offspring of immigrants.

“Their future is here,” he said. “The main challenge is how to connect this new generation to Dutch culture.”

But the challenge will also be to keep them tethered to their faith.

Berksun Cicek is of Turkish descent but no longer practices the Muslim faith. She is involved in an organization for LGBT Muslims and was surprised by the PVV’s strong showing in her hometown, Rotterdam, a working-class port city with many immigrants and a Muslim mayor.

“The patience is decreasing on both sides” of the political spectrum, she said. “I hope for the best.”

Klaas van der Kamp, secretary-general of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, believes religion should be a unifying factor in the country, which has a long history of ecumenical cooperation among disparate confessions.

“The church is one of the few organizations in society that has members in all areas of society,” he said.

But he said a vacuum has been left by the decline in religious engagement.

Bishop de Korte feels the same way. And he said Wilders played into insecurities of a cross section of Dutch people.

“A lot of people are insecure—also a lot of Christians,” he said. “But I think there is a difference between people who are baptized and people who are going to church. A lot of Christians have also voted for the PVV, I think. But what I see is that people in the parishes and in the Protestant communities who are active in the church, there the PVV are only a small minority.” —Matt Richards and Z. Fareen Parvez, Religion News Service

Turkey's president builds an Islamic nationalism while amassing power

The builder-handyman and his fiancée, a cleaner, work for a small Istanbul company that has been going through tough times.

Harun Demir and Seniz Kaya could not look less religious, or less political. Yet they are the face of a new politics in Turkey, a staunchly held view of Islamic nationalism deliberately and painstakingly shaped by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP.

They believe—like many in their country—that Erdoğan's heavy hand on everything from press freedom to engineering unprecedented presidential power is justified as the best path to solve Turkey's constellation of problems. The country had 30 attacks by militants last year, faces a struggling economy, and is at war in southeast Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.

"Now there seems to be a new pattern of leadership: Erdoğan, Russian president Putin, and Trump—they are not dictators, they are strongmen," said Demir, approvingly. Erdoğan "is talking to people, he is doing it for the people. Maybe he is twisting some arms, but it is for a good cause."

Turks should be patient and have faith in Erdoğan, Kaya said. "It's our role as Turkish citizens to trust our leader."

They shy away from the term "Islamic nationalism," but say that in a diverse country religion can bind people together. They also echo officials when they say that Turkey is in the process of restoring its historical Ottoman influence as a leader of the Islamic world. Those references point to a moderate form of Islam, but with authoritarian rule. Indeed, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım has portrayed Erdoğan as a descendant of a well-regarded Ottoman-era sultan.

Critics charge that Erdoğan has dragged Turkey into a quagmire of social division, anti-Western sentiment, financial troubles, and multiple conflicts abroad. But the president has cast even the escalating attacks by the so-called Islamic State and Kurdish militants as a response to his country's resurgent greatness.

"Turkey is under very serious attack both inside and outside," Erdoğan said in January. "It is not because we are a weak country, but because we are a stronger and stronger country."

Erdoğan, who has been in power for 15 years, has gradually turned his country away from the tradition of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who founded the modern state from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. And there is little room for any competing views as the once ardently secular eastern anchor of NATO, which has aspired to membership in the European Union, clamps down on opponents and the media and moves away from democratic norms.

Recent polls indicate that Turkey's conservative religious political bloc is a majority that will shape Turkish politics for the foreseeable future.

"They think that Turkey is facing big troubles, and they are correct on that, but they think those troubles are created by malicious forces conspiring against Turkey—that's Erdoğan's narrative, they buy into that," said Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish analyst of politics and culture. "They think this conspiracy will only be undone by a very powerful, defiant leader, which is of course Erdoğan himself."

Akyol, currently a senior fellow of the Freedom Project at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, and also author of *The*

Islamic Jesus, noted that Erdoğan's opponents have been jailed and exiled.

For decades, the military served as a self-declared bulwark of Turkish secularism, mounting four coups since 1960 to block Islamists from governing. But AKP rule has since neutered the military's role in politics and made changes in the name of religion. Recently, for example, female army officers and cadets were officially allowed to wear headscarves as part of their uniforms. After a decades-long headscarf ban, there was a similar ruling for policewomen last year and, in 2013, for civil servants and in schools. And in February officials broke ground on a new mosque on the edge of Istanbul's iconic Taksim Square, after years of controversy.

There has "always been a xenophobic, paranoid nationalism, but since it was based on Atatürk, it was also a secular nationalism," Akyol said. "But now it is nationalism [with] a heavy dose of Islam, so it appeals to religious conservatives very strongly. . . . Turkish religious conservatives have always had this feeling that Turkey was the standard-bearer of Islamic civilization."

The trend of Islamic nationalism has only accelerated since an attempted coup last July, in which Erdoğan's call to loyalists to take to the streets brought the coup attempt to a swift end. The AKP organized a month of nightly rallies



RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE: A monument in Taksim Square in Istanbul commemorates the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. As a sign of the growing move away from the secularism of the republic in Turkey, a new mosque is being built at the edge of the square.

PHOTO © LEONID ANDRONOV (THINKSTOCK)

across the country that blended national- and Islamist imagery.

A state of emergency has been renewed twice so far, and according to some estimates 125,000 people have been fired or suspended from their jobs and nearly 50,000 arrested for suspected links to the coup attempt. In the political whirlwind, the AKP has convinced one opposition party to join it in rewriting the constitution to realize Erdoğan's dream of creating an unassailable executive role—to its critics, a modern-day sultan.

Ahead of a national referendum on amendments to the constitution on April 16, an annual poll by Kadir Has University found a deeply divided society, but one with a coalescing majority.

Giving religion a higher profile has been part of the AKP's agenda from the start. The number of mosques in the country has risen from 78,608 in 2006 to 86,762 in 2015, according to the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

"We are trying to make religion . . . a

more vital part of life," said Aydin Yiğman, the mufti of the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul and a ranking official in the Turkish state religious authority. He wears a suit and tie, not religious garb, and is mostly clean-shaven, in keeping with Turkey's secular custom for officials since the 1920s.

"The goal of this education is so people learn the correct Islam," he said.

He suggests that there is no greater religiosity among Turks now, yet the scene appears different from years past as the faithful these days spill onto the streets around mosques in some Istanbul districts during Friday prayers. New Sunday morning prayer meetings for youth attract up to 250 people a time.

"We don't want people to think of the mosque only on Friday," Yiğman said. "It is not something bad or under pressure. We want to build this upon love, so people are receptive to God's call, because it is God's call." —Scott Peterson, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Nonprofit offers Talmud in English online for free

FOR SOME, the notion of delving into the Talmud in English for free with the click of a mouse was something they could only dream of. Now that dream is becoming a reality.

Sefaria, a nonprofit organization devoted to Jewish text learning, recently announced it had uploaded 22 tractates of the renowned Steinsaltz English-language edition of the Babylonian Talmud and will post the remainder as they are translated and annotated.

The Hebrew version of the Talmud will begin going online by the end of the year. Known as the William Davidson Talmud, the online edition offers parallel translations linked to major commentaries, biblical citations, midrash (ancient rabbinic literature), and halakhah (Jewish law and jurisprudence).

The Talmud is central to rabbinic Judaism but has mostly been the purview of rabbis and scholars, in part because it is written in Aramaic and in part because it encompasses multiple volumes.

"Ninety percent of the world's Jews speak Hebrew and English," said Daniel Septimus, Sefaria's executive director. "The Talmud is in Aramaic. From an accessibility point of view, it's a game changer."

Although there are other online Talmud editions, they are either not in English or charge hundreds of dollars for access. Sefaria's edition has a Creative Commons noncommercial license, meaning anyone can use it as part of the public domain for noncommercial purposes.

The project is funded by the William Davidson Foundation in cooperation with its publishers, Koren Publishers Jerusalem and Milta.

Septimus said the project, which required the efforts of 15 engineers and countless scholars and translators, has been a labor of love.

"For the Jewish people, our texts are our collective inheritance," he said. "They belong to everyone, and Sefaria wants them to be available to everyone." —Michele Chabin, Religion News Service

Conservative synagogues can now officially accept non-Jews as members

Although some Conservative synagogues have already welcomed non-Jews as members, the body that governs America's second-largest stream of Judaism has now officially sanctioned the practice.

The 94-8 vote of the general assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the umbrella group for the movement, allows individual congregations to decide whether they will extend membership to non-Jews.

"The Rabbinical Assembly believes in the idea that synagogue life should be open to those who wish to be part of the Jewish community, and we are enriched by their presence," said Stewart Vogel, treasurer of the association of Conservative rabbis. "We encourage a spirit of welcoming that can strengthen the connections of all."

Vogel is also vice chair of USCJ's Commission on Community and Covenant, which convened last year to consider ways to engage interfaith couples.

The March 1 vote comes at a time when the U.S. intermarriage rate for Jews hovers around 60 percent.

Though the movement had previously extended official membership only to Jews, non-Jews were still considered members in some Conservative synagogues through family memberships that included all people in a household, Jewish and non-Jewish.

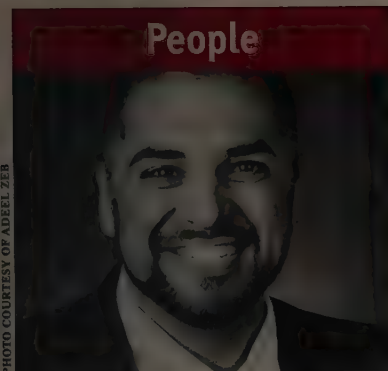
The Conservative movement sits between Reform, the largest stream of Judaism in the United States, with its less-strict interpretation of Jewish law, and various branches of Orthodox Judaism, the smallest and most traditional.

There is pressure within the USCJ to be yet more welcoming to interfaith couples and to allow its clergy to preside at interfaith weddings, an option open to Reform clergy.

A 2013 Pew Research Center study showed that 18 percent of American Jews identify with the Conservative movement. —Lauren Markoe, Religion News Service

People

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADEEL ZEB



■ An imam, **Adeel Zeb**, will lead the National Association of College and University Chaplains.

Members of the Baltimore-based organization chose Zeb, who is a chaplain at the Claremont Colleges, to be their next president at a recent annual conference. When he takes up his post in June, he will be the first Muslim to serve in the role since the association's creation in 1948.

Among the challenges he sees for chaplains in higher education today is making religious traditions a tool for bringing students together.

Attending college is often students' first experience of getting to know people at a deeper level who are from a different ethnic or religious background, he said, but "they're tired of bigotry, and racism, and xenophobia."

Zeb finds hope in the many examples of people of faith who have worked for a better society.

"We're not the first people who have created pathways of intersecting social justice issues and faith and spirituality," he said.

He tries to add to that legacy while adapting to current circumstances, such as the anxiety caused for Muslim communities and international students and professors after the travel ban for people from several predominantly Muslim countries, first signed in late January.

"What was beautiful," Zeb said, was "how many people flooded the airport. Muslim people were praying publicly, openly in a group at the airport. I don't think people understand what a big deal that is."

Usually, when Muslims pray by themselves at an airport, they face secondary

screening or are watched by security guards, Zeb said.

Thinking about the rise of Islamophobia, he recalled a meeting he attended with then attorney general Loretta Lynch when he worked at Duke University, after three Muslim students were killed in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in early 2015. Black Lives Matter was also taking off. He asked Lynch about response to Islamophobia and police shootings of black people. She said that it takes everyone, not just those who are suffering.

"There's an onus on everyone," he said, "to speak out against injustice." —Celeste Kennel-Shank, the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*

■ **John Carl Ylvisaker**, a songwriter and composer best known for "I Was There to Hear Your Borneo Cry," died March 9 at age 79 at his home in Waverly, Iowa.

His website gives the cause of death as complications from cancer and multiple system atrophy.

He studied music and history at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and during part of the 1960s traveled around the United States working for civil rights causes, counting activist and folk musician Pete Seeger as a major influence, his website notes.

His ministry "introduced to the Lutheran church a new genre of church music—the contemporary folk hymn—a combination of folk song and rock 'n' roll," Concordia wrote in an alumni publication. He wrote more than a thousand songs and created three songbooks titled *Borneo Cry I, II, and III*.

He spent 15 years working for the American Lutheran Church, a predecessor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, including as a composer-in-residence and a radio show producer. He also directed music in parishes and led workshops, retreats, and youth gatherings.

"His workshops provided a message of encouragement to both clergy and laity that worship music on all but high feast days is to be easily sung by those in the pews, making the service participa-



PHOTO COURTESY OF FERN M. REIGER

tional by all instead of a performance by a few," his website notes.

The Wartburg College campus plans to offer live streaming of Ylvisaker's memorial service, which he created, on April 26 at 1 p.m. at www.wartburg.edu/knightvision, as well as an archive version. —the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* staff

■ Baptist ethicist **Robert Parham**, the founder of the Baptist Center for Ethics and a critic of the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention, died March 5.

EthicsDaily.com, the center's website, reported that Parham died at a Nashville, Tennessee, hospital. He was 63.

"His purpose was the same as the organization he founded and deeply cherished: to help people of faith advance the common good," said Kevin Heifner, chair of BCE's board of directors. "This was not a sound bite for him but the way he lived out his understanding of the essence of the gospel."

Born in Nigeria, the son of Southern Baptist missionaries, Parham worked for the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, focusing on hunger, the environment, and race. A moderate Baptist, he left the commission and started his center in 1991 as the denomination grew more conservative in the resurgence that began about a decade earlier. He was a critic of that conservatism and a commentator on topics ranging from the birther movement to just war.

As the Obama administration mulled over military intervention in Syria in 2013, Parham said, "War is always more costly with more negative unforeseen consequences than war-makers project."

Serving as an editor, Parham expanded his center's work to producing documentaries, including one about how churches address global poverty.

Despite being diagnosed with the rare disease amyloidosis, Parham continued to work on documentaries on topics including Baptist-Muslim relations, racism, and genocide in Nigeria, which he had witnessed as a seventh-grader. —Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service



PHOTO COURTESY OF ETHICSDAILY.COM/ MICHAEL KROUSKOP

LIVING BY The Word

April 30, Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:13-35

THE CLEVELAND Indians' locker room after a ten-inning game seven. Hillary Clinton's campaign headquarters early on November 9. The emergency room after an unsuccessful tracheotomy. A quiet office after a pink slip is found on the desk. A lonely bathroom where a plus sign just won't appear on a pregnancy test.

This is where Cleopas and his companion find themselves. They've lost. They're defeated. They poured their whole lives and selves into following this man they knew was the savior. They gave up everything to follow him. Then he died—defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory. The one who was supposed to deliver them all couldn't even deliver himself from the cross.

This isn't how the story was supposed to end. Remember the waving palms? What about the victory and celebrating and God's kingdom coming to earth? All of it gone.

Now they find themselves walking down a road to Emmaus. It's likely not even an actual, physical place. Frederick Buechner quips that Emmaus is the place where "we throw up our hands and say 'Let the whole damned thing go to hang. It makes no difference anyway.'" It's the place of desolation. It's the young mother holding her stillborn child in her arms, walking around the delivery room, with no idea where to go or what to do.

And then the miraculous: Jesus comes near! But unfortunately "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Why don't they see him, the one they put their faith in and left everything for? Are tears clouding their vision? Are they simply unable to pick their heads up from watching the dust stirred by their sandals on the ground before them?

Luke leaves those details to our imaginations. We only know that Jesus invites them to tell their story. I imagine Jesus saying, with perfect pastoral sensitivity, *So tell me what things have been like for you over these past few days.* And they share. They share what it was like to look across Golgotha and see the Roman guards celebrating their victory, what it was like to walk through Jerusalem and be laughed at by those who never thought Jesus was the Messiah. They share what it was like to flee the city, fearful that they might be crucified next—to start toward a destination unknown because they simply can't stay where they are. They share what it is like to feel defeated, deflated, and alone.

They do this on Easter Sunday. Luke says this is still the "same day" when the women went to the tomb and then told

the others what they heard and saw: not just the missing body but the angels saying that Jesus is alive. Yet Cleopas and his companion can't see past the empty tomb, which is no sign of victory to them.

So Jesus tries to explain it all: *Don't you understand that this is all part of the plan? We talked about this. Don't you remember?* Clearly they do not. This should come as no surprise; they never do. Jesus' disciples just don't ever seem to get it—no matter how many times he tries to tell them.

By now it's gotten late. So they offer him a place to lay his head for the night—not because he's Jesus, just because it's the hospitable thing to do. They sit down to a meal together, and their guest takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them.

Takes, blesses, breaks, gives—how many times have they seen him do that before? Around the table, surely. But when else? When he took a young child to his knee, blessed her, broke through the disease that held her captive, and then gave her back to her parents newly healed? When he went into the temple and approached the money changer's stand? Maybe he said a prayer before breaking it down and then handing it, in pieces, back to the money changer, saying that he would do this and more in the days to come? They probably didn't understand what he was doing then, either. But they saw him take, bless, break, and give; they have seen this pattern before.

They must have, because in this moment their eyes are opened. It isn't when he comes near them; it isn't when he walks with them; it isn't when he tries to explain it all to them, again. It is when he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives them bread—something so ordinary that they have seen it before, time and time again.

It's only then that the tears give way, their heads look up from the table, and they finally see who has been journeying with them. Jesus is alive after all! The tomb, the angels, the women—can it really be true? It is all coming back to them now—they see. And then, in an instant, they see no more. He is gone.

Is this not the way God so often enters our lives? Not in the miraculous, but in ordinary taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. In the hug of a friend we haven't seen in a while, in the laughter of a child frolicking in the grass that has finally surfaced from beneath the snow, in breaking a trail through the woods, in giving to the food pantry, in blessing an evening meal: we recognize God.

With our eyes opened in the midst of this everyday reality, we are reminded that all is not lost. We are not defeated or alone. Love has won; Easter is here to stay. We see, and we begin to understand—and in that instant, Emmaus is gone.

Reflections on the lectionary

May 7, Fourth Sunday of Easter
John 10:1-10

THERE'S AN identity crisis going on in this text from John. Who's who? And what are they supposed to represent?

There's a sheepfold. It must be a pretty special place, because thieves and bandits are trying to get inside. Is the sheepfold heaven, communion with God, a relationship with Jesus? Are the thieves and bandits those who haven't earned that reward, that communion, that relationship? Whatever it is, it seems like a place we'd like to go to. So we must be the ones who need to be let in.

But then we learn that the one who enters the gate is the shepherd. The shepherd is in charge of the sheep, so that can't possibly be us. Also, if we read ahead to verse 11, we learn that Jesus is the shepherd, so that must be who John is talking about.

But if Jesus is the shepherd, who's this gatekeeper? Who would be letting Jesus in to the sheep? God? Wasn't God the bridge to humanity when Jesus was born? We read that story just a few months ago. And now Jesus is the shepherd and God is the gatekeeper? It's difficult for us to understand. John says Jesus' listeners don't get it, either.

So Jesus clarifies, or tries to: "I am the gate for the sheep." Wait a minute, wasn't the gate just a gate before, just an inanimate object? Now Jesus is the gate—so who's the shepherd, the one whose voice the sheep recognize? And who is the gatekeeper, the one swinging Jesus open and closed for the shepherd to enter? It sounds like a poorly written, poorly delivered Abbott and Costello routine.

It may be that we have here the conflation of a number of parables. Taken independently, Jesus can be the gate that separates the sheep from the world outside, or the gatekeeper who lets people in and keeps people out, or the shepherd whose voice the sheep know. It works when we separate the metaphors.

But that's not the real problem with this text. The real problem is the sheepfold we started with. While theologians and clergy are playing the who's who game, another audience hears this text and focuses on the sheepfold. A sheepfold can do only two things: hold something in or keep something out.

Now, those sitting in their pews, religiously, on Sunday morning may love the image this conjures. They're in the sheepfold, grazing on the lush green grasses, following the sound of the shepherd's voice, being led beside still waters, and protected when they leave the fold to journey through those

dark valleys to their next grazing spot. What could be more serene? Say the 23rd Psalm, sing "God Will Take Care of You," and the service is complete.

But there's a new young woman in worship on Sunday. She slips in shyly, beneath the "All Are Welcome" banner, and makes her way to the balcony, hoping not to be noticed. She's really not sure why she's here, but deep down she is hoping maybe there's a word she can hear that will help her deal with the alienation she has felt from the church since she came out to her family years ago. She, too, is fixated on that sheepfold. There are sheep inside, she thinks, and I'm not one of them. And there's a barrier to getting in—the church wants to keep me out. I'm not good enough; I haven't been faithful enough. God doesn't love me for who I am. The sheepfold will never be for me, because I'm the one the gate is intended to keep out. So she slips out before the benediction, as quickly as she entered, realizing, once again, that the church is not the place for her.

In John's context, his intention seems clear: make a relationship with Jesus something to be coveted. Make those Jews who may still be wondering about Jesus start to believe in him. Make the gentiles see that there's something here for them as well. But today this attempt at getting people into the sheepfold often feels more like an attempt to keep other people out. To the LGBTQ community, to the single mother, to the divorced father, to the teenager battling depression, to the young family whose car isn't nearly as fancy as the ones parked next to it, to the couple who have never been to church before—the sheepfold feels exclusive, unattainable, unwelcoming. This is the real problem with the text.

It's not the identity crisis, it's the location crisis: From where do we hear this text? Inside the church it feels inclusive and loving; outside the church it feels exclusive and marginalizing. That's a problem. It's not the message Jesus was trying to give then, and it's not a message the church can afford to give people now.

So tear down the sheepfold, remove the gate, do away with the gatekeeper. Allow the sheep to roam freely in the world and let God be the Good Shepherd of the psalm, roaming with all the sheep, chasing after them with goodness and mercy flowing everywhere. Or at least show a gate that doesn't close anymore. And then hope that the young woman in the balcony is listening.

The author is Jeffrey M. Gallagher, senior pastor of the United Congregational Church of Tolland in Connecticut and author of Wilderness Blessings: How Down Syndrome Reconstructed Our Life and Faith (Chalice).

WHEN ONE CONGREGATION
RECEIVED A WINDFALL, IT
TRIED AN EXPERIMENT

Take and give

by Laura Sumner Truax
and Amalya Campbell

IN SEPTEMBER 2014, more than 300 people made their way to a downtown Chicago church for what they expected to be a typical Sunday service. Hours later they emerged from church surprised, perplexed, excited, and nervous. Each had been given a \$500 check accompanied by one short sentence of instruction on what to do with the money: "Do good in the world."

Laura Sumner Truax is senior pastor at LaSalle Street Church in Chicago. Amalya Campbell is a marketing director who has served on the church's leadership council. This article is excerpted from Truax and Campbell's book Love Let Go: Radical Generosity for the Real World, just published by Eerdmans. Used with permission of the publisher.



That summer, LaSalle Street Church had received notice of the sale of a property it had invested in years before, when the church had joined with three other faith communities to create a low-income housing project called Atrium Village. The notice of sale announced that each of the four churches would receive a check for over \$1.5 million.

Because it was the middle of summer, with many members and staff on vacation for weeks at a time, those of us in leadership chose to hold off announcing the news to the church until September, when the fall programs would begin.

But waiting to make the announcement didn't mean we were waiting to discuss how that money would be spent. This sum—which ultimately rose to \$1.6 million, roughly double our annual budget—came during a time of acute financial pressure. Just a month earlier we had stood in front of our congregation and informed them of a \$50,000 deficit. We had already cut our operating expenses as much as possible. We knew we might have to reduce staff hours. Additionally, we struggled with the loss of access to a neighborhood parking facility. The prudent side of us knew that this new windfall shouldn't be used to plug a hole in the budget or mask unsustainable aspirations. Still, looking at all that money did make us wonder if perhaps just a little could be set aside for our operating expenses.

During the discussion that ensued that summer, a wild counterintuitive idea emerged: Why not give some of the money away? Not just a token amount, but 10 percent, or \$160,000. What a surprising example of grace and freedom it would show the world. Churches are infamous for repeatedly asking for money. But we were in a position to give money. Why not give the first 10 percent to the people of the congregation and ask them to do whatever they thought God wanted them to do with it?

The idea led us to deeper questions: What if we showed the congregation we trusted them to do good with gifts they never sought or expected to receive—in the same way God has trusted all of us by placing this world into the hands of men and women in the first place? In fact, what if this entire exercise of tithing to the people became a metaphor for what God does for us every single day? We would be pointing to the reality that every one of us has something far more valuable than free money, and that daily we are being asked to do something good with it.

These reflections led us to that September Sunday when we distributed a LoveLetGo check for \$500 to every member and encouraged them to give the money away.

When we recognize our identities as givers, we start seeing others differently. Our framework of interpretation shifts, and we expand beyond the confines of labels and ground rules. We begin to see the roles other people play in the same story of generosity in which we participate. The reframing becomes contagious—others begin to see themselves, us, and the world differently, as LaSallers discovered in giving away their \$500.

One of the church members who received a \$500 check was Dan West. Dan plays many roles at LaSalle, but most of our congregants know him as the “voice of God.” Often when a

scripture passage calls for God's voice, we enlist Dan, whose robust and resonant timbre keeps us at rapt attention. Dan also epitomizes the image of the gentle grandfather, with his warm smile, hearty laugh, and billowy, milky-white beard.

After weeks of reflecting on how to use his check, Dan felt compelled to start giving away his money in person, \$20 at a time, with his own hands. Rather than donating to a nonprofit organization to do great works, which certainly would have honored the intent of the campaign, Dan wanted to do the work directly himself.

On his first trek into his local neighborhood, after meandering the streets for two hours with \$20 still nestled in his pocket, Dan came across a daycare center bearing this sign: *Naptime 1–2:30. Please do not ring the bell. Knock quietly.* The

We decided to trust the congregation to do good the way that God trusts us.

middle-aged woman who opened the door upon Dan's gentle tapping had a spit-up stain on her shoulder, and her weary countenance suggested she needed a nap as much as the children. Dan explained why he had come, saying, “I thought maybe you would know of someone among the parents of these children who really needs it.”

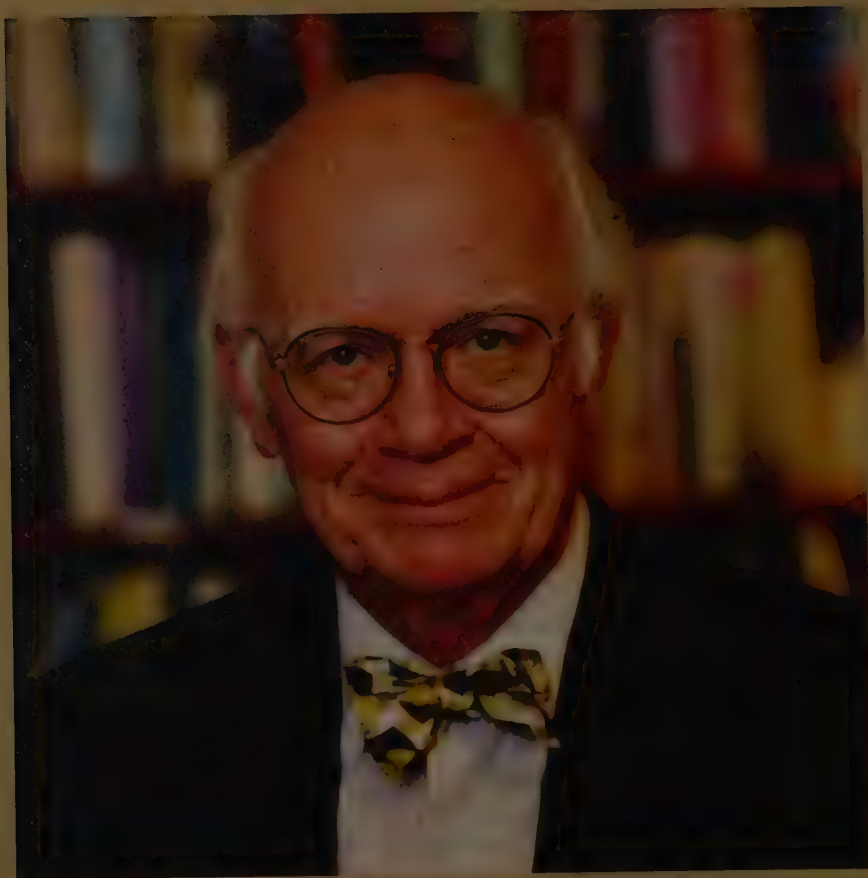
“Nah. I don't know nobody like that,” she responded as she began to close the door. Determined, Dan held out the \$20, insisting he didn't want anything in return, he wasn't selling something, he just wanted the money to do some good.

What makes us suspicious of a grandfatherly figure who comes to the door offering money? Why does our fear radar activate, setting off warnings to be vigilant in the face of danger? When someone comes to the door offering \$20, we presume he or she expects \$20 worth of something in return. But Dan was peddling grace, and he expected nothing but the connection that grace creates.

The longing for connection and relationship contrasts with our typical transactions—much of the time we actively avoid establishing connection. Thanks to the self-serve checkout line at the grocery store, the ATMs or phones we utilize as bank tellers, and the ability to purchase almost everything online, we no longer need to know the person who sits on the other end of a transaction. Within our homes and offices, we find ourselves communicating via text or e-mail with someone sitting several feet away. Given the ease with which we can avoid interactions, we might wonder if any attempt to live relationally is fighting a losing battle. But in the generous life, proximity and relationship matter.

Yet money itself seems to have a distancing effect. To understand the subconscious role of money in our lives, psychologist Kathleen Vohs and her colleagues carried out nine experiments during which they primed some participants with

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the idea of money. (An example of priming is using the word *soup* and then later asking someone what five items a household typically stocks in its pantry. People are more likely to include *soup* in the response if they have come across the word recently.)

In one of Vohs's experiments, people sat down at a computer to fill out a questionnaire. After six minutes, a screensaver appeared on some of the computers. Some participants saw images of money floating underwater, some saw fish swimming underwater, and others saw no screensaver at all. After the participants completed the questionnaires, each of them next set up two chairs: one for themselves and another for a second participant who would soon enter for a get-acquainted conversation.

Those primed with the brief, subconscious image of money placed their chairs more than one foot farther apart, almost 50 percent farther apart than unprimed participants. The takeaway: exposure to the mere image of money distances us physically from others, without our conscious awareness.

All nine experiments by Vohs and her colleagues demonstrated similar results: money-primed participants acted more independently than unprimed subjects.

No wonder that child-care worker nearly closed the door on Dan. Her involuntary, subconscious mind-set prevented her from seeing Dan for who he was—one beggar showing another where to find food.

Dan's encounter reveals how the mention of money increases our likelihood to want to keep our distance from others. It also demonstrates an insidious assumption we make in the presence of money: someone wins and someone loses—also known as a zero-sum game.

With zero-sum games, keeping score seems pretty straightforward. If we work for a company offering year-end bonuses, we know that if our colleague down the hall gets more, then we get less. High school seniors applying to college recognize that if a classmate wins a spot, they're more likely to be on the losing end of the admissions lottery. Even young children breaking open a piñata at a birthday party realize that every piece of candy snatched by another preschooler means one fewer treat for them.

Part of us likes keeping score. We like to know where we stand. We like the concrete, definitive nature of wins and losses. We like setting targets for ourselves and for our lives. At the heart of it, we like keeping score because we believe scores tell a story. And in a zero-sum world, the story features winners and losers. Haves and have-nots. Us and them.

Keeping score, after all, is an ancient sport among members of the human race. Consider King David of the Bible, fondly called "a man after God's own heart." When we first meet David, he tends the family's flock of sheep in the fields. Despite his unexceptional beginnings, David catapults onto the scene as the victor over Goliath, the conqueror of invading armies, and, ultimately, the king of a united Israel. In the world of zero-sum games, he merits the title "winner." Given his meteoric rise, David deserves to feel proud of how far he and his nation have come under his leadership.

Yet in psalm after psalm, David sings God's praises. He thanks God repeatedly and unabashedly for the graces and gifts he has received. David's consistent message in every breath: *Not by my hand but by yours, Lord, have these blessings come.*

Until the day David begins to wonder. In 2 Samuel 24, David tells his commander Joab to take a census of the people "so that I may know how many there are." David has a hunch he can tell an epic story with the numbers. By keeping score, he can document the story he believes the figures will tell: *Your kingdom, David, is huge. Massive. Well done.* After the counting is complete, a mere ten verses later, David awakens to his hubris. "Stricken to the heart," he pleads with God for forgiveness, acknowledging, *I let the story become about me.*

Keeping score separates us from each other, from God, and from our core identities as givers. It moves our chairs farther apart.

In October 2014, one month after our LoveLetGo giveaway, LaSalle member Eric Larson read a post from a Facebook missionary friend in Africa pleading for a woman named Fatou. Abandoned by her husband and family because a leg injury had rendered her incapable of typical women's work, Fatou had traveled throughout her country, trying various indigenous healing methods to no avail. At the end of her 13-year exodus, she ended up in the town where Eric's contact, Linnea, served. With Linnea's help, she received medical treatment. But the doctors determined that amputation presented the sole option to save Fatou's life. Linnea asked for donations of any amount toward the cost of the surgery.

That's when Eric reached out, asking how much in total was

This day by the sea

—March 25, 2016

Annunciation Day and Good Friday,
a rare convergence, not to happen again
for over a century. "This doubtful day
of feast or fast," wrote Donne.
"Christ came and went away."

Dawn opened like the rose in Mary's hand,
ignited the surf for one brief hour
before the cloud bank fell, heavy and gray.
Crash and sigh, thrust and withdrawal
over and over. The cries of gulls,

as though there are no words for such
compression, only the vowels of a young
girl's "yes" crammed against abandonment—
groan and hiss becoming night,
her son's raw cry into emptiness.

Jean Janzen

needed for the operation. The response: \$500. The figure got Eric's attention. And Fatou received her amputation.

In November, Fatou recovered from surgery. She spent much of her time with her new friends in Linnea's community, sharing her story of grace. After 13 years of exile, Fatou lived fully and happily.

But in the last two weeks of December, Fatou's health took a devastating turn, and in early January she fell into a coma and died.

When he heard the news, Eric wrote, "I felt like I failed because the funds didn't buy a cure." Because Eric works at a rehab hospital, he knew how long the recovery from an amputation would take, he envisioned what the rehab process would be like, he estimated when Fatou would be healthy enough for a prosthetic leg, and he imagined a future for her, including worthy work and perhaps a new or reunited family.

In his moment of feeling like a failure, Eric's transactional framework prevailed. This was far from a storybook ending: Fatou had lost her life, and he had lost a nobly desired outcome for her. Also, as Eric freely admitted, he felt like he had lost face, because other LaSallers would be coming back to church sharing incredible stories of impact from their \$500 gifts. Even when living generously, we are tempted to keep score.

Yet generosity has a bigger story. What looks like failure to us is recast. After some reflection, Eric saw tremendous victo-

ry in the final chapter. Fatou might have died alone and desperately; instead, she died in a community of people whom she loved and who loved her back. Our transactional, zero-sum rules fall short when measuring what really counts.

Eric never met Linnea or Fatou. Yet through giving, he had a fledgling connection that he wanted to nurture. Generosity brought close what was far off.

After Dan West pleaded with the woman at the child-care center, she kept the door open. She listened to Dan, leaning in as he repeated his purpose. He only wanted to give the money to someone who could use it, and surely she knew a family in need. She hesitated. She paused. Silence filled the seconds.

Finally she asked, "Could I keep it and use it myself?"

It wasn't the response Dan expected. "Well, are you really the person here who needs it the most?" he asked.

"Yes. I believe I am," she replied.

So Dan leaned in, too, and put the \$20 into her hands. She blessed him and called him an angel, saying she never thought she would see an angel. With tears in his eyes, Dan blessed her back and walked home with an empty pocket.

When two givers interact, the ground rules change. A transaction becomes more than a simple exchange; the value gets amplified. We may be primed to keep score, but generosity brings us close and alters our perspective. That's what LaSallers began to see when they gave of themselves along with their checks.

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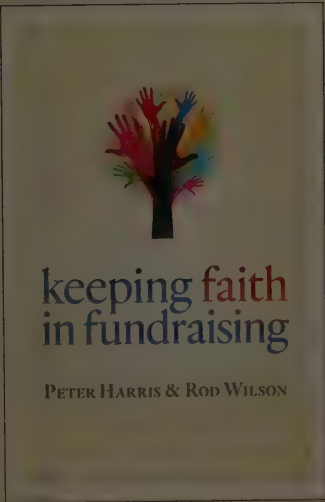
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Scripture may be clear, but it's not easy

The plain sense?

by Mark Labberton

IN HIS PREFACE to the Geneva French Bible, John Calvin exhorts: "You who call yourselves bishops and pastors of the poor people, see to it that the sheep of Jesus Christ are not deprived of their proper pasture; and that it is not prohibited and forbidden to any Christian freely and in his own language to read, handle, and hear this holy gospel."

This statement is about the church and its book, a community made by and for knowing God's purposes and thereby reflecting God's glory by reading, handling, and hearing this good news. For Calvin, the life, identity, and well-being of the church can only be sustained and enacted by the Word of God that constitutes, redeems, and re-creates our life. By this pasture alone does knowledge of God come uniquely and specially to God's people. What the church is hungering for, what alone can nourish and sustain us in our life of faith, comes from our having direct and unmediated access to the Word written.

Calvin, like many of the Reformers, spoke confidently about "the perspicuity of Scripture." He was convinced that just as the gospel of Jesus Christ is available for every kind of person, so the Bible, which proclaims this good news, must be as well. This double conviction is evident from his very first Reformed writing, the preface to Olivétan's New Testament. He explains that the fulfillment of the Old Testament law and the reconciliation of God in Christ "is what is stated plainly in the [New Testament] and set forth there openly." The purpose of the translation is "to enable all Christians, men and women, who know the French language, to understand and acknowledge the law they ought to obey and the faith they ought to follow." Scripture makes plain both our human need and God's way for salvation; this is the core of the claim of perspicuity.

Calvin's training in rhetoric frames the backdrop to his view of divine revelation as God's speech: the perfect divine rhetoric explains the success of God's self-revelation. The implicit elements of this revelatory rhetoric include the speaker (God the Father), the speech (God the Son), the voice (God the Holy Spirit), the speaker's speech (God's mighty acts and words), the speaker's book (the Bible), the speaker's preachers (clergy), and the speaker's hearers (the church). These dimensions of God's revealing Word form a theological and rhetorical unity as God's speech. William Bouwsma captures Calvin's view in this way: "God's dis-

course is not couched in the timeless abstractions of logic. . . . Like a skilled orator he speaks to [people] in a language adapted to their capacities and their needs, taking historical and cultural differences into account and adapting his communication to the times."

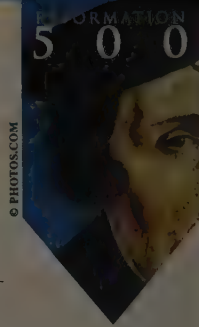
Calvin and the other Reformers are the impetus of a vision that continues today. Amity Press in China, now the world's largest Bible publisher, has produced well over 100 million Bibles. Confidence in the perspicuity of the Bible, and of God's dynamic revelation by Word and Spirit, still calls and shapes God's people.

The Reformers assumed that the Bible is able to make God's ways plain.

The great irony about the claim of perspicuity is that it is not perspicuous, or at least not as clear as it might sound. The greatest evidence that perspicuity is not self-evident is provided by Calvin himself, who argued for the perspicuity of the Bible while writing thousands of pages of commentary to help make plain to the ordinary reader what the scriptures were saying and teaching. What was plain and clear plainly needed some explaining.

The point here is not to be cynical about the claim of perspicuity, but to point to what we all know—that the scriptures can be clear but not easy. I can offer my own witness to this reality. Growing up outside the life of the church with no specialist reading skills, I began to read and reread the New Testament. I was without instruction in almost any of the historical, cultural, political, or theological issues of the text. I was by no means sure there was a god, or whether, if there was a god, this text and its apparent claims were true or relevant to some possible divine being. Initially, I had no sense of reading out of any self-conscious search for God. It simply seemed

*Mark Labberton is the president of Fuller Theological Seminary. This article is excerpted from the forthcoming *The People's Book: The Reformation and the Bible*, edited by Jennifer Powell McNutt and David Lauber. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press.*



to me that a literate person would be acquainted with the Bible, and so I read.

To my utter surprise, this Bible proved itself to be perspicuous to me, by laying out in ways I could grasp that I was known and that in the reading of this text I was being loved, sought, convicted, called, and redeemed by the true and living God who came to save us, Jesus Christ. The clarity of scripture was in this sense plain to me.

But the plainness also made clear that to respond to this text would be to take up the most difficult, lifelong challenge I could imagine. It would mean inhabiting and being inhabited by the complex story of God that made claims about creation, human identity and purpose, moral reality, human suffering and pain, power and injustice, failure and grace. Transformation can sound like a promise, and surely it is one. But that promise includes the painful challenge of being remade.

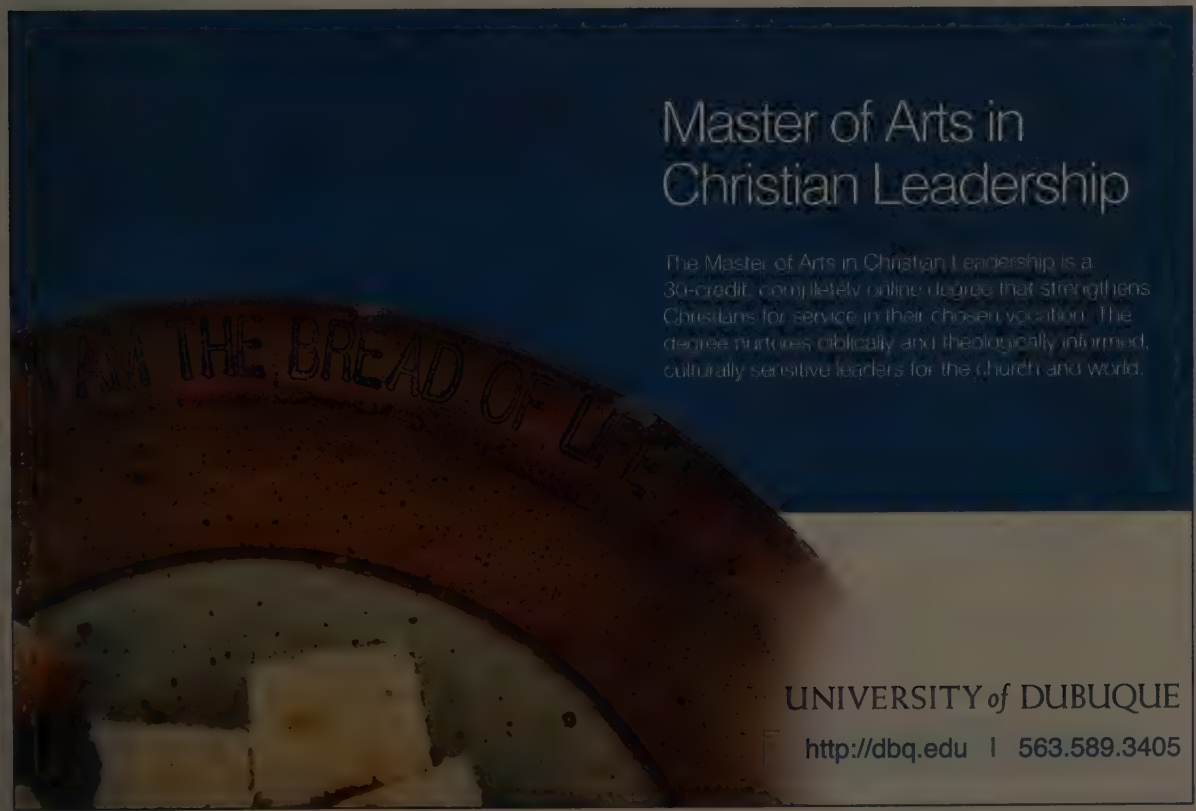
The apparent democratizing of divine knowledge that the perspicuity of the Bible provided for was affirmed by the Reformers, but the priesthood of all believers did not mean the equality of all readers. Calvin could imagine Bible reading occurring only in the context of Christian community and not by isolated readers on their iPhones between dumbbell sets at a 24-hour fitness club. This shift would have been literally unimaginable for the Reformers, because for them, reading was a communal act that extended back in time

through history (including biblical history) and encompassed all its many members and readers. In the “proper pasture” Calvin envisioned, the sheep did not find the pasture or graze there alone.

Furthermore, in the Reformed tradition, some readers in the Christian reading community were to be of greater importance and have more sway than other readers. Calvin readily admits that Bible reading is a learned skill and itself a process of learning, not uniformly comprehensible. As with the Ethiopian eunuch, “those things which are hid from us, we must pass over until we see greater light . . . Scripture shall be made more familiar by use. . . The Lord never keeps the eyes so shut, but that, as soon as they are once entered, the way of salvation appears unto them in the Scripture.”

The people of God were to be a reading community, but not a reading community in which all readings are created equal. It can be argued in fact that the Reformed tradition substituted a priestly mediated table with a preacherly mediated Bible. To this day, the meta-message of Calvin’s tradition is that while all sheep may have access to the perspicuous text as life’s “proper pasture,” grazing there is best done under the guidance and direction of the best possible readers. In the course of “reading, handling, and hearing the holy gospel,” what we can trust as clear is the exposition of a well-trained preacher, who in turn depends on the professional academic readers’ commentaries.

Deference to perspicuity, therefore, can come to seem like a



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justification for both giving and taking away the Bible from the community of faith. Giving the Bible to the people is basic to some of the instincts of the Reformation, but so is the practice of taking the Bible away from the people and giving it to pastors, or even more so to the academy. While anyone can and should read the Bible, not all readers will do so well or wisely. What, then, makes for a good Bible reader? How do skills as readers and faithfulness as readers interact with one another? Is a highly trained, technical reading of, for example, 1 Corinthians 13 necessarily a better reading than an obedient, embodied, nontechnical reading?

o, my Christ

My Son, athirst
pressed tight
so up
against His
narrow Tree I see

from here
at His Feet
His Despair, their
disgust, at

what I now know

with simeon's
sword-like thrust

what must
have come to pass
but is not yet
past; and

so, I aghast
at what
His Father hath
wrought

am too hard pressed
to know
why not quite yet
judas by all
others will be

accurst, save

by My Son
will someday be

blessed ...

For many ordinary readers who live and breathe and read and pray and believe in postmodern culture, all we have is context. Our reading is affected by who we are, when we read, where we read, with whom we read, and so on. On a systemic level, we always read in a communal context, shaped by the sociology, gender, race, class, and more that surrounds us. This is the inescapable, defining context that is not settled in the text but affected by what is in front of the text and greatly influences everyone's ability to read and hear the Word of God. That I am a tall, white, educated male influences how I, and people like me, hear the perspicuous Word of God.

This contextual embeddedness can lead to the skeptical conclusions about knowing, language, and texts that are at the core of many current hermeneutical debates. Theological knowledge that is claimed accessible through an objective text and mediated by a hierarchy of privileged knowers has become for many problematic and unacceptable. In a culture that makes knowledge claims per se questionable, many people are anxious to find not a perspicuous text but a perspicuous community—a perspicuous church—that authentically shows their knowledge claims. This searching dramatically affects how the church sees itself and its mission. It also affects how and why the Bible is read.

Surely one of the plainest teachings of scripture is that only God is God. The first commandment makes this claim perspicuous. While the 16th century wanted to ensure people had access to the perspicuous text that pronounces this teaching, the 21st century wants to see people who perspicuously live this claim.

It is also evident, in history and today, that many plain readers of the scriptures do not actually believe or live the plain truth that God alone is God. We in fact do want both God and mammon, or God and reputation, success, power, wealth, fame, satisfaction, health, safety, and much more besides. A plain and faithful reading of scripture may help us gain everything that truly matters, but it will also lead us to lose what does *not* truly matter. This reality affects our reading. Frankly, we don't like it—and we dislike it so much that we radically alter the plain meaning of scripture for the sake of what we want more. The history of Bible readers does not reveal a people who bow before God alone. To many, this failure of Christian readers to demonstrate what they confess makes the readers and their text irrelevant.

If the clear window of scripture doesn't produce lives changed by that vision, then why should it be of significance or relevance? This question is at the heart of the crisis of claims to theological knowledge today. After all, is it not the history of plain readings that has justified the abuse of women, or slavery, or apartheid, or the tolerance for Jim Crow, or bolstered the American nationalism that has justified the use of torture in defense of our self-interests, or the fabrication of a prosperity gospel, or a tolerance for injustice that makes it God's issue and not ours? As plain as it is that God alone is God, readers still have a hard time taking that reading and letting it change the way they read themselves or the world around them. Our plain reading is often just our plain, self-justified reading, the plain reading that leaves me or us alone, rather than the plain reading that is meant to make us new.

Carl Winderl


"The Bible says it; I believe it; that settles it" is understood by some to be an "expression about a perspicuous text. But that apparently contextless claim does not matter if those who make it fail to understand the disjunction of such a perspective to many people who are awaiting the lived evidence that only a perspicuous people can provide. The church's mangled reading exposes

If reading scripture doesn't produce changed lives, how is it relevant?

that what we claim to see and affirm so clearly from the perspicuous Bible is plainly not what we live. And that becomes the turning point of critique, either of the Bible or of the church or of both. Plainness is not easy. The reading community of the church is vital, not all readings or readers are created equal, and encountering God through scripture is still less about mastering the text than being mastered by the text. Accessibility, literacy, and scholarship all matter tremendously, but so does context and faithfulness in reading and living the text so its meaning becomes perspicuous to our world.

I was converted again to this conviction one night in northern Uganda. The Lord's Resistance Army was still at its evil games, and children slept in "night commuter" camps to try to stay alive and not be captured and tortured into becoming a child soldier. This night, as every night, hundreds of children came to sleep together in the rough of an empty school. Only one adult was stationed there—a middle-aged woman available to help and comfort any who might have need. Her husband and children were at their home a few blocks away. She explained that she came each night as a volunteer. We talked, and eventually I asked her why she was doing this. She talked about the children's need and her desire to do what she could under such difficult circumstances and in the face of such fears.

Still wanting to know more, I pressed, "But what motivates you to care? Why do you do it?" She looked me up and down and finally said, "Well, I am what you call a Christian. I read my Bible every day, and every week I go to a church where we eat something called the Lord's Supper. I can't read the Bible every day and share in that meal and not come here at night." The question of perspicuity is shockingly alive and well—especially when such plainness makes sophisticated readers of a technically inexhaustible book want to spend still more time in the "proper pasture" to which Calvin calls us. CC



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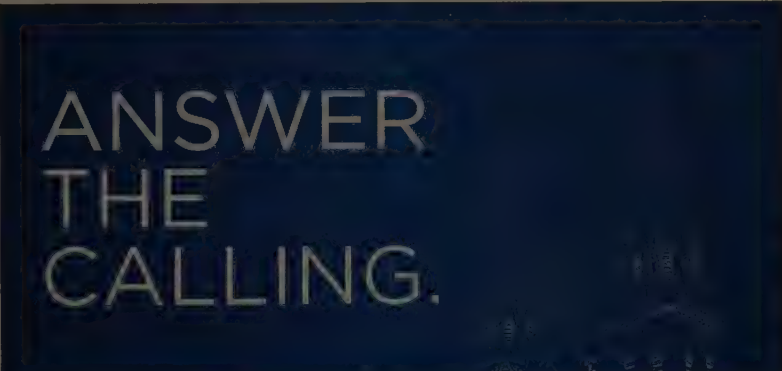
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Bible scholar Larry Hurtado

What made early Christians peculiar?

LARRY HURTADO has focused much of his research on the early development of devotion to Jesus. His books include *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (1988) and *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (2005). His latest book, *Destroyer of the Gods*, highlights the distinctiveness of Christian beliefs within the religious world of the Roman Empire. Hurtado is professor emeritus at the University of Edinburgh, where he established the Centre for the Study of Christian Origins.

Because Christians' belief in one God precluded them from worshipping other gods, early Christians refused to worship local gods or join in other religious ceremonies. How peculiar was this behavior in the ancient Roman world?

So far as we know, the only religious groups that took this stance were those of Judaism and early Christianity. Of course, what became Christianity originated among early first-century Jewish followers of Jesus, and the stance against worshipping the traditional gods of the larger Roman world was inherited from the ancient Jewish matrix of the Jesus movement.

In the case of the Jews, however, Romans saw their exclusivist stance as basically an ethnic peculiarity. Jews didn't try to convert other peoples from worshipping their gods, so the Romans could accommodate their refusal to worship the Roman gods.

But from a very early point the Jesus movement became a trans- and multiethnic movement, and it made converts of pagans, so it came across as much more of a threat to social, religious, and political stability. To refuse to worship the gods was to refuse to recognize the basis on which the political and social structures rested. In the eyes of the people of that time, Christians simply had no right to refuse to worship the gods of their families, cities, and the empire. It was probably the most offensive feature of early Christianity.

Celsus, for example, a pagan critic of Christianity in the late second century, expressed a willingness to tolerate all the other objectionable things about Christians if they would only assent to worshipping the gods. That's indicative of how it mattered and how it was regarded.

Belief in one God has a theological as well as a social or political dimension. How much do you think pagan converts were aware of this?

Actually, the notion that behind all the various particular deities is one supreme deity who exercises an overall sovereignty over the world was circulating at the time, especially in philosophical circles. Stoics, for example, taught that everything happened according to the divine purpose. For that reason, humans should humbly submit to everything that happens to them, whether good or bad. Some early Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr, sought to articulate Christian faith in dialogue with philosophical trends of his time and often posited similarities.

“Christians' refusal to worship the gods was a threat to social and political stability.”

Again, the crucial differentiating thing was this: the pagan philosophical notion of one supreme deity carried no implications for one's worship of the various particular deities. Early Christian teaching, however, involved the renunciation of the traditional gods and a refusal to join in sacrifice to them.

Early Christian teaching also emphasized that the supreme deity acted in love toward the world. This too was a somewhat novel idea. The character of the deity that early Christianity proffered was somewhat different from pagan notions.

Another peculiarity of Christians was their focus on texts and the interpretation of them. This would seem to be a socially limiting factor insofar as it required literacy to be a leader. Was it?

I suspect that early Christian leaders were probably individuals who had some prior experience and aptitude for leading. Studies of Paul's letters suggest that the leaders of the small Christian groups that he founded tended to be men and women who ran small business operations and had households with a few servants. This sort of individual also likely developed some literacy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS



The ability to read and write was likely important in early Christian circles, but literacy wasn't limited to the social elite of the time. Often, for example, household slaves were taught to read and write so that they could serve their masters in a variety of tasks.

Given the peculiarities of Christianity, the question arises: What was so appealing about Christianity? What made Christians willing to face ridicule and suspicion for adopting this faith?

I don't have answers to this question myself, but it is an important one that thus far hasn't had adequate attention. I'm not sure that we can posit a single answer to the question—likely there were varying factors for different individuals.

Justin Martyr says, for example, that he was drawn by the persuasive reasoning and doctrines of Christianity. Others, I suspect, were drawn by the experience of an almighty deity who was motivated by love (an idea that I can't find in Roman-era pagan discourse). Others may have been attracted by demonstrations of divine power in exorcisms and other such phenomena, or by the moral commitment of Christians, their ethical living standards.

Many believers lapsed from the faith, indicating that for them the social costs were too great.

Christianity began as a branch of Judaism—and probably would have been seen that way by pagans—so it is all the more surprising that it was ultimately among pagans and not Jews that Christianity took root. How do you explain that?

Well, Paul felt himself divinely called specifically to proclaim the gospel among pagans (gentiles), and he devoted himself to an impressive translocal mission to fulfill that calling. But to judge from Paul's discussion in Romans 9 to 11, it appears that only a minority of Jews (a "remnant") became adherents of the Jesus movement. I don't have a ready explanation for this.

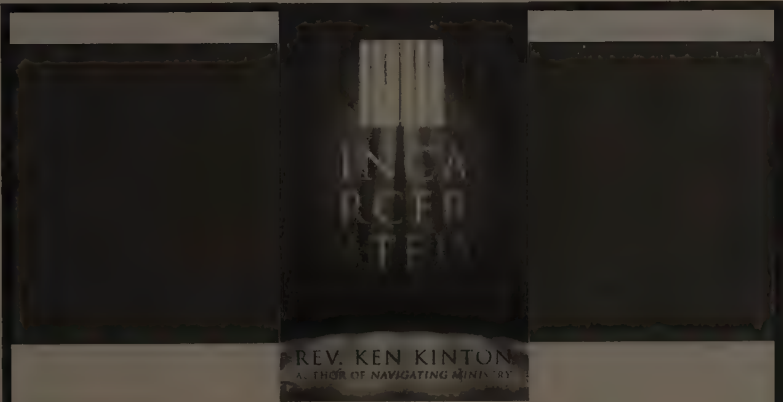
The claim that Jesus is Lord was a startling innovation within Judaism, with its focus on the one God. Christians started to assert that God is two yet one. Was there any precedent for this dyadic way of thinking about God?

The initial claims seem to have been that God had raised Jesus from death and installed or exalted him as the universal Lord to whom all now were to submit and through whom they were now to be reconciled with the one God. This very quickly entailed the belief in Jesus' preexistence, especially the belief

that somehow he was also the one through whom God had created the world and through whom God was now redeeming the world (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:19). Still more novel was the conviction that God now required Jesus to be given the sort of reverence otherwise reserved for God alone (e.g., Phil. 2:9–11; John 5:22–23).

Yes, this dyadic pattern of beliefs and devotional practices was a novel and remarkable development. In *One God, One Lord*, I surveyed evidence of what I described as a "chief agent" tradition in ancient Judaism—the notion that God had a being who served as God's principal agent, a kind of vizier to God. In some ancient Jewish texts, this is a heavenly or angelic figure; in others, a biblical hero such as Moses or Enoch; and in some texts a personified attribute of God (such as Wisdom) serves in this way.

I proposed that the earliest believers adapted this "chief agent" category and posited Jesus in such a capacity. But they also expanded this category in novel ways, most notably in the conviction that Jesus was to be programmatically included as recipient of worship along with God. In the eyes of at least some Jews of that time, this was abhorrent, even blasphemous. I think that the initially vigorous opposition to the Jesus movement by the young Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, was likely prompted at least in part by this view of the matter.



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As for the pagan world, it had lots of divinized human figures. But it's one thing to imagine the divinization of a figure in a polytheistic outlook in which you can have as many gods as you want and quite another thing to accommodate a second figure in a monotheistic outlook in which there is only one deity to whom worship is to be given. The logic is considerably different. I don't see any real explanation for the distinctively dyadic pattern of early Christian belief and practice in the pagan religious environment of the time.

Is belief in Jesus as Lord still being worked out in New Testament texts?

Actually, the fundamental convictions that Jesus has been exalted as the true Messiah, Lord, and God's unique Son; that Jesus now bears and shares God's glory; that Jesus is the agent of creation and redemption; and that Jesus is to be revered along with God are all presupposed as familiar and common among believers in Paul's letters, which date from the years 50 to 60. As the great German scholar Martin Hengel noted, there was more crucial christological development in those first two decades than in the succeeding seven centuries.

This feature is confirmed by the fact that there aren't many extended discussions or explanations of beliefs about Jesus in Paul's letters—he presupposes that his readers are

already acquainted with these beliefs. One comparatively longer passage is Philippians 2:6–11, which speaks of Jesus “in the form of God (or a god)” becoming a man, obedient to the point of crucifixion, and then uniquely exalted by God and given “the name above every name,” and so to be revered by every level of creation. Already in earliest New Testament texts, Jesus is constitutive for adequate discourse about God and adequate worship of God. To cite another early though shorter text, note 1 Corinthians 8:4–6, which speaks of “one Lord, Jesus Christ” set alongside the “one God, the Father,” and Jesus is posited as “the one through whom are all things [in creation] and through whom we exist.”

The dyadic pattern of belief is patently clear, and yet the condensed expression of it suggests that Paul in some sense presupposes that his readers know it. And consider 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:6, where Paul compares the transient glory of Moses and Torah with the greater glory of “the Lord” Jesus, who is “the image of God” (4:4) and who reflects God's own glory (4:6).

To be sure, in subsequent decades the expressions of early Christian belief continue to develop, but the impetus for all this, the fundamental convictions that drove it, and the key questions that Christians strove to address were all there in the earliest texts.

That Christians were so peculiar in the pagan world suggests a countercultural identity. Yet some Christian texts were also keen to say that Christians were not a threat to the pagan empire. In the end, how much of a challenge to empire were the Christians of the first few centuries?

Christians in the first three centuries generally tended to avoid conflict with their pagan environment where they could do so without seriously compromising their Christian convictions. Christian texts of the time profess a readiness to pray for the emperor and the welfare of the Roman Empire, and they portray Christians as positive members of their society. The Roman physician Galen expressed a certain grudging admiration of Christians as demonstrating the sort of ethical standards also advocated in philosophical schools.

But in the main the evidence indicates that pagan observers of early Christians found their religious convictions and practice (especially their refusal to honor the traditional gods) threatening to the established religious and social order. Despite Christian professions of being good citizens, pagan critics saw their refusal to worship the gods as undercutting the bases on which the social and political order rested.

For Christians today living in a setting in which Christianity is either a suspect minority (as in China) or only one option in a multifaith culture (as increasingly is the case in Western societies), the texts of the first three centuries of the church offer the best resources for thinking about how to combine a positive contributory role in society with a firm commitment to maintaining Christian convictions.

CC

—David Heim

A villanelle for Easter Day

As though some heavy stone were rolled away,
You find an open door where all was closed,
Wide as an empty tomb on Easter Day.

Lost in your own dark wood, alone, astray,
You pause, as though some secret were disclosed,
As though some heavy stone were rolled away.

You glimpse the sky above you, wan and grey,
Wide through those shadowed branches interposed,
Wide as an empty tomb on Easter Day.

Perhaps there's light enough to find your way,
For now the tangled wood feels less enclosed,
As though some heavy stone were rolled away.

You lift your feet out of the miry clay
And seek the light in which you once reposed,
Wide as an empty tomb on Easter Day.

And then Love calls your name, you hear Him say:
The way is open, death has been deposed,
As though some heavy stone were rolled away,
And you are free at last on Easter Day.

Malcolm Guite

by Stephanie Paulsell

A text of resistance

IN A COURSE that I'm teaching on Christian spirituality, my students and I have felt ourselves directly addressed by everything we've read, from medieval commentaries and sermons to visionary literature, from prison letters to autobiographies. The power of these texts to speak to readers is nothing new. What feels new is the sound of their voices in this particular moment.

My students and I notice that bits and pieces of our reading have been turning up in newspaper articles and editorials. In February, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks explored models of resistance to the Trump administration, some drawn from the literature of Christian spirituality. If the primary threat is authoritarian, Brooks argued, then we are in a Bonhoeffer moment, and the best course is direct action in the streets. If the threat is corruption, then we are in a St. Benedict moment and must keep our heads down and our hands busy creating new forms of community until this wave of barbarism has passed. If the threat is chaos born of incompetence, as Brooks believes, then we're in a Gerald Ford moment, one that calls for public servants who are committed to restoring the norms of governance that the Trump administration has been aggressively shredding.

Gerald Ford is not on my syllabus, but Bonhoeffer and Benedict are. Benedict, in fact, is the man of the hour. Several of my students have read about him in publications like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Atlantic*. What has he captured so our imagination in this moment?

Perhaps it's that he is able to think practically about how to live faithfully in the midst of chaos. Benedict wrote his Rule for monasteries as the Roman Empire was staggering to its end and armies were sweeping toward Rome from the east and the north. For Benedict and his brothers, there was much to fear.

Even so, Benedict's Rule calls for communities that are less defended than some contemporary readers imagine. Author Rod Dreher sees the "Benedict Option" as a way for conservative Christians to protect a certain kind of Christian culture in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision to guarantee the right to marry to same-sex couples. Benedict's Rule is less concerned with locking the gates against the hordes and more concerned with leaders who can hold power without misusing it, more concerned with study and prayer, with the relinquishment of worldly rank and private property, and with the cultivation of humility, mercy, and forgiveness. It is also deeply concerned with welcoming guests—welcomed, Benedict writes, as

if they were Christ himself. Benedict does offer a special word of welcome to fellow Christians, but he also insists that all who present themselves be welcomed with honor—and especially "poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received."

If Benedict's Rule is a text of resistance, what is it that it helps us resist? Can a rule that receives each stranger as Christ really serve as a brick in a wall intended to keep LGBT people and their influence on the outside, as Dreher suggests? What happens to the LGBT people on the inside? What about the LGBT children born into such communities?

My students and I spent a morning talking with a monk about what it's like to have one's life governed by a monastic rule. We discussed monasticism in its origins as a kind of resistance movement—a history that Brooks and Dreher also invoke. We asked the brother if he thought monasticism, at this moment in history, retained that quality of resistance to the status quo.

He replied that he lived his vocation as a form of resistance, not by keeping certain people outside the walls, but by welcoming people in. When you open space for people to encounter the mystery of their creation in the image of God, they become more finely attuned to the dignity of others. For him, the monastery is not a refuge from the world but a community that bears witness to the sacredness of our common humanity, a place where anyone can, by sharing in the monks' prayer, silence, study, and community life, become formed for the mercy, humility, and forgiveness that's at the heart of Benedict's project.

Our country is developing policies that categorize people by religion and country of origin, deny safety to refugees, and render the vulnerable more vulnerable. The Rule of St. Benedict offers a path of resistance, but not by offering us a place to ride out the culture wars. The threats that Brooks names are real: authoritarianism, corruption, and chaos. Beneath them all, though, is the most basic threat of all: the diminishment of human dignity. This puts us in a Benedict moment. We need to see and welcome the stranger as Christ, and Benedict can teach us. From the chaos of the sixth century, he reminds us that God is waiting for us to translate what we learn into action.

Stephanie Paulsell is a professor at Harvard Divinity School and coeditor, with L. Gregory Jones, of The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher.

IN Review

Justice and open borders

by Richard J. Hoskins

How to keep balanced on an issue like immigration? At one extreme, some want to build walls and exclude Muslims. At the other, generous souls (many of them Christians) would extend unconditional welcome for unlimited numbers of uninvited arrivals. Is there a moral position between these two views—a position that would treat with dignity, compassion, and generosity those who seek to live in our country but would also honor a nation's need to control its borders and reasonably limit immigrant flows? David Miller thinks so.

Miller, a careful philosopher and professor of political theory at Oxford University, begins by asking the fundamental questions: Why does a nation have a moral right to exclude anyone who wants to enter? If all human life is of equal worth, why should one's fellow citizens matter more than "strangers" who want to enter and join the nation?

While Miller respects the strong cosmopolitanism that motivates such questions, he eventually settles on what he calls a "weak cosmopolitanism," in which a nation is morally justified in limiting entry in accordance with the interests and wishes of its citizens, subject to two requirements: (1) that adequate provision be made for admitting genuine political refugees, and (2) as to non-refugees, that reasons must be given (subject to public debate) when exclusion is necessary. This stance, he contends, meets the minimum standard of justice; more expansive policies of entry may be desirable on humanitarian grounds but are not required by justice.

Miller grounds the moral justifica-

tion for privileging current inhabitants over applicants for admission (and thus the right to control immigration) in each country's right of national self-determination. The fact that compatriots within the boundaries of a nation self-identify as citizens of that state has intrinsic social worth, he argues, because it supports a structure of mutual solidarity which, in turn, nurtures the feeling that such citizens "belong together and have responsibilities to each other." This mutual fellow-feeling authorizes individual sacrifice for the greater good, which undergirds the complex scheme of cooperation that constitutes a democratic nation-state. An unlimited flow of immigrants not subject to legal restrictions could undermine that accomplishment.

So, who should enter? Miller distinguishes sharply between economic migrants—those pursuing work and a better life—and asylum-seeking refugees with a "well-founded fear" of persecution or death in their home country on the basis of "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." This is the definition of the 1951 Geneva Convention, which is also the standard under U.S. law. Miller argues for a broader definition: those whose lives or fundamental human rights are in jeopardy and cannot be protected except by moving across a border, whether because of state persecution, state incapacity to protect, or prolonged natural disasters.

Refugees fleeing to avoid persecution or to save their lives are entitled to our deepest sympathy—and deserve



Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration

By David Miller

Harvard University Press, 240 pp., \$35.00

the fulfillment of our obligations under international law. But even here hard choices must be made, especially if the number of refugees is overwhelming, as it currently is in several states of the European Union. If the number of refugees is more than a state reasonably can absorb, how should it decide whom to admit and whom to refuse?

One answer is random selection: a lottery. Another is a particularized determination based on such factors as the extremity of the refugee's hardship, the absence of alternatives for the refugee, or the likelihood of successful integration into the host society. Miller does not draw a definitive line between what is morally required and what is morally desirable on humanitarian grounds, but his thoughtful discussion of the alternatives provides a principled framework within which an ethical line could be debated.

Economic migrants, understood broadly to include those seeking a better life for themselves and their families, also have a moral claim to admission. But it is more qualified than that of refugees. In such cases, Miller finds it permissible to condition entrance on "mutual advantage," including what the migrant brings to the host society in needed skills or eco-

Richard J. Hoskins practices law and teaches at the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law in Chicago.

conomic benefits. He also argues that a host society may consider the extent and degree of cultural differences between immigrants and current residents, particularly since admission of immigrants implies a moral obligation to provide the conditions under which they may be incorporated into society on terms of equality. Incorporation entails social costs, fiscal and otherwise, which are properly part of the calculation.

Miller insists that an additional factor must be considered: negative effects on the migrant's home country, such as the loss of talented or well-educated persons needed in the development of the country left behind. The more advanced societies must not be indifferent to the harm of causing a "brain drain" on less developed countries for the benefit of the better-off host countries. Miller doesn't specify how exactly one balances the mutual advantage that favors the admission of economic migrants against the brain drain that should count against such admission.

Strangers in Our Midst is not a handbook of political solutions, nor a roadmap to equitable immigration policies. Rather, it is a work of political and moral theory, with the advantages and disadvantages of such a work. The chief advantage is a contribution to clear thinking—much needed at present. Thus, for example, the distinction between the minimum requirements of justice and, above that level, the permissible range of democratic alternatives, is a valuable aid to parsing the moral arguments for and against more open borders. More generally, the book identifies the values that lie beneath various arguments and clarifies the moral considerations that ought to be part of any public debate, including principles that set limits on the moral permissibility of certain reasons supporting open or closed borders.

Miller is most useful not in proposing answers to which everyone will subscribe, but in proposing questions in such a way and within such a context that there can be common moral ground among those who disagree on specifics, and thus an improved prospect of progress toward workable and effective solutions.

The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America

By Frances FitzGerald
Simon & Schuster, 752 pp., \$35.00

One would think that the decision on the part of a distinguished author such as Frances FitzGerald to take on the sweep of evangelicalism in America would be cause for celebration. FitzGerald wrote an acclaimed history of the Vietnam War, *Fire in the Lake*, and a lively book about American visions of community, *Cities on a Hill*. But this hefty book's coverage of a broad and internally diverse movement is curiously pinched and narrow—and not merely because the author elects to omit the rich tradition of African-American evangelicalism.

The Evangelicals suffers from the common disease of presentism: the author takes the current political manifestations of evangelicalism as the essential clue to its historical identity. FitzGerald dispatches with two centuries of evangelical history—everything up to the time of the Scopes Trial of 1925—by page 142. Her approach also betrays a bias for the Reformed or Calvinist strain of evangelicalism, with its emphasis on theological orthodoxy, as opposed to the Wesleyan-holiness strain and its focus on personal and social reform. (Donald Dayton's indispensable account of the latter tradition, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, which would have provided some balance, appears nowhere in her extensive bibliography.) The effect is somewhat akin to viewing a landscape with one eye closed. Yes, the other eye makes adjustments, but the depth and texture of the panorama is lost.

FitzGerald begins her narrative with the Great Awakening of the 18th century. She mentions the three Ps that came together in that colonies-wide revival—Pietism, Presbyterianism, and Puritanism—although the emphasis clearly is on the theologian Jonathan Edwards and the vestiges of New England Puritanism. Dating the Awakening to Northampton

Reviewed by Randall Balmer, who teaches at Dartmouth College. His most recent book is Evangelicalism in America.



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in 1734, she ignores several precursors to evangelicalism who appeared decades prior (including Edwards's grandfather Solomon Stoddard, the Dutch ministers Guiliam Bertholf and Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, and the Swedish pietist Lutheran Lars Tollstadius). She mistakenly locates the center of the Dutch Reformed revival in New York rather than New Jersey.

FitzGerald's treatment of the Second Great Awakening at the turn of the 19th century is more balanced. She catalogs some of the social reform initiatives that arose out of the Second Awakening, but she fails to mention the searing critiques of capitalism issued by the most influential evangelical of the 19th century, Charles Grandison Finney.

The author's preference for the Reformed axis over the Wesleyan-holiness strain bedevils her treatment of the 20th century and the emergence of the religious right. When, for example, she notes that Carl F. H. Henry, founding editor of *Christianity Today*, articulated some tepid criticisms of business, she is unable to connect those remarks to precedents in the previous century. Similarly, she treats the emergence of the

religious right as a kind of immaculate mobilization that "sprang up all at once among networks of pastors across the South from Virginia to Southern California" and gives scant attention to countervailing voices in the evangelical world.

Those voices may not have enjoyed the megaphone of media empires, but they were hardly silent. FitzGerald recounts the drafting of the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern in November 1973, but then progressive evangelicals drop almost entirely from the narrative until the waning years of the George W. Bush administration. Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist deacon and Sunday school teacher, the nation's first avowed born-again president and a progressive evangelical, receives only scattered mention—far less, for example, than Phyllis Schlafly or even Herb Titus, a truly fringe figure. The chapter on George W. Bush, the nation's second born-again president, by contrast, consumes more than a hundred pages.

FitzGerald renders the inner workings of the religious right in granular detail. We hear, for example, about James Dobson's tantrums and Richard Land's partisan harangues, but only brief and belated reference to *Sojourners* magazine's Call to Renewal or the effort of Red Letter Christians to emphasize the social teachings of Jesus. The author commendably plunges into the works of Rousas John Rushdoony and Francis Schaeffer, but the writings of Jim Wallis receive no comparable midrash. Shane Claiborne, a "rock star" among younger evangelicals and a radical (not progres-

sive) evangelical, merits only a single reference.

FitzGerald's reluctance to identify the principal catalyst for the religious right ultimately hobbles her attempt in the epilogue to interpret the 2016 election, in which Donald J. Trump received 81 percent of the white evangelical vote. Rather than draw on definitive historical research (as well as the testimony of Paul Weyrich, Ed Dobson, Grover Norquist, Richard Viguerie, and others) that locates the origins of the religious right in the defense of tax exemption for segregated schools, FitzGerald opts for the catalog approach, asserting that the galvanizing issues were the defense of school prayer and the opposition to abortion, gay rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Those latter explanations have been explicitly disavowed by the aforementioned founders of the religious right.

The 2016 election allowed evangelicals finally to dispense with the fiction that their political behavior was motivated by moral concerns or "family values." Their support for a thrice-married, self-confessed sexual predator and casino owner represented a definitive break from the noble, reform-minded tradition of Finney and 19th-century evangelicalism. At the same time, tolerance for Trump's racist rhetoric signaled a return to the founding concerns of the modern religious right.

Over the long sweep of history, however, and viewed with both eyes open, the religious right is less the evangelical juggernaut that FitzGerald supposes than a tragic aberration within the evangelical tradition.



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Human Acts: A Novel

By Han Kang

Hogarth, 224 pp., \$22.00

One week after Han Kang's novel was published, the U.S. president threatened the city of Chicago with de facto military invasion, banned citizens of several Muslim countries from entering the country, ordered the CIA to resume torturing people, and was declared by his chief of staff to be the world's only reliable source of information. Bad news comes so fast that I don't have time to ask myself if I'm numb to it. I watch and rewatch the video of a fascist getting punched by a black bloc protester on inauguration day, nerving myself up for a kind of street violence that a year ago I'd have condemned out of hand. Forget about the self-absolving liberal cant phrase, "I no longer recognize my country." Lately I don't recognize myself.

For these and other reasons, it's a good time to be reading Kang's brutally compelling book. The novel, written in seven long chapters, circles around a teenage boy, Dong-ho, murdered during the 1980 Gwangju Uprising in South Korea. But its cast of characters also includes a professor writing a study of the massacre, an editor, a playwright, a translator, and the novelist herself. Kang is already known in the United States for her superb 2009 novel *The Vegetarian*, which was published here last year. Both novels share a focus on violence. But while Yeong-hye, the heroine of *The Vegetarian*, is so repelled by brutality that she tries to make herself into a tree, the characters in *Human Acts* display a little more resilience.

The new novel's theme is the dignity and the cowardice that atrocity brings forth from people—and often from the same person. Dong-ho, hours before his own honorable death, fails to rescue a doomed friend. The survivors of military prison, tortured beyond bearing, still fault themselves for little failures of resistance.

Admirably, Kang portrays these characters' courage as the only redeeming factor in human history without lying

about how little comfort it provides. The survivors of the massacre are depicted as haunted and guilty, and the dead continue to appear as confused or angry ghosts. (In real life, many of the victims of Gwangju were denied proper burial or even identification.)

The novel's emotional realism, which is impressive, compensates for some unconvincing, excessively literary touches. For example, one character, an editor, is slapped seven times by a policeman and then devotes each day to forgetting one of the slaps. The chapter is structured by these seven forgettings. I spent most of it distracted by wondering what kind of weirdo counts slaps and doubting that anyone—even a character who hangs out, as this one does, with writers and actors—would be so self-consciously theatrical as to give each one a designated day. For that you'd need a performance artist, at least.

The final chapter features Kang herself, who grew up in Gwangju and moved to Seoul only months before the massacre. Dong-ho was the boy who moved into her old bedroom after she left. This personal connection fails to fascinate the reader as much as it does Kang. I am not one of those readers who cries "Self-indulgent!" at any intrusion by the author on the main stage of a novel. But in this case, it moves the book's focus from the massacre and the death of Dong-ho to the writer's struggle to make sense of these things—an important but ultimately less interesting subject.

Nevertheless, *Human Acts* is an important and intelligent work by a major writer. Anyone interested in fiction as a way of knowing, of thinking, should study it. It points to a way of writing about those deaths for which a state refuses to claim responsibility. America's current atrocities will be similarly disclaimed—the Muslim woman fleeing violence and harshly turned away, the black teenager casually murdered and slandered by a police officer who knows Attorney General Sessions has his back. I wish this novel would become a museum piece, but I don't think it will anytime soon.

Reviewed by Philip Christman, who teaches composition at the University of Michigan and edits the Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing.

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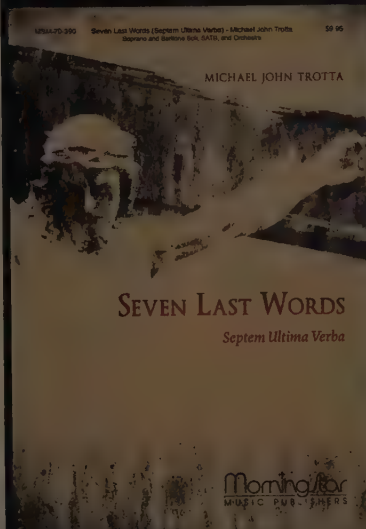
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Sacred Habits: The Rise of the Creative Clergy

Edited by Chad R. Abbott
Noesis Press, 304 pp., \$28.00

Creativity gives rise to further creativity. At our church this past Advent, we arranged the chairs in our worship space into a circle so that the congregation itself formed the Advent wreath. Candles were placed on stands at four points on the perimeter of the circle, and each Sunday's service began with the congregation processing in song around this living Advent wreath. With the creativity expressed in this liturgical event, our worship planners not only honored church tradition and brought the congregation bodily into Advent; they also nurtured a congregational imagination for future creativity in our life together.

Stories of how others creatively approach congregational life spark my own creativity in ministry. For me, the most useful of the 22 essays in this new collection are those in which the authors—all of whom are active in parish ministry—tell such stories.

Jeffrey Gallagher describes how he took up running early in his clergy career. His running time became a time of prayer, envisioning sermon illustrations, and viscerally connecting with God's creation. As a runner, I nodded my head in appreciation as I read, having shared these experiences. But the essay gets more interesting—and more inspiring—when Gallagher describes how running became connected to other aspects of his pastoral ministry.

During Lent one year, Gallagher challenged the congregation to run cumulatively the total number of miles from their location in Maine to Jerusalem. As the congregation embraced this challenge, they not only received health benefits. They also experienced the deepening of community as people shared their experiences of connecting with God through running. Later members of the congregation formed a running team that met weekly to prepare for a 5K race. Then, in a moving response to the Boston Marathon bombing, the church

sponsored a 2.62 mile run on the streets of their town as a way of praying for all those impacted by that tragedy. As a result of promotional e-mails and Facebook postings, over 100 people showed up for the run—many of them not from the church.

Gallagher's story is, on one level, about the creative possibilities for ministry of a particular practice: running. But more broadly, it inspires me to ask: What do I love to do that might serve as a means of congregational formation and outreach into the community?

Another pastor, Michelle Torigian, describes several creative worship experiments her church carried out. For example, on snowy Sundays when it would be too hazardous for congregants to venture out to the church building for worship, the pastor notified members that a worship service would be held for the church's Facebook group beginning at 6 p.m. The Facebook worship service began with Torigian welcoming people and providing an opening prayer. The service continued with video clips, confession and assurance, a recent blog post the pastor had written, and a few questions to ponder. The time together ended with a blessing from the pastor.

Despite my ambivalence about the role of technology in our lives, I found myself imagining variations on this approach that might work for my congregation. I couldn't simply replicate what Torigian's congregation did—we don't get snow days where I live in Southern California. But I was able to riff on what they did in creative ways that fit my own context.

Another pastor, Zayna Hart Thompson, uses public spaces creatively in her pastoral ministry. Every Wednesday afternoon, from 2-5 p.m., she sits in her local coffee shop for "public office hours." Her congregants know that she will always be there and that they are welcome to drop by.

One congregant, Jane, sat down to chat, claiming to be just stopping by while out running errands. But she eventually shared with Thompson that she wasn't really running errands. She was

Reviewed by Rob Muthiah, who teaches practical theology at Azusa Pacific Seminary.

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coming from a support group for families with loved ones suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's. That moment in the coffee shop with her pastor provided a sacred space for reflection before Jane summoned the courage to return home. Another congregant, Roger, serves on the church's governing board, works full-time, and partners with his wife in parenting three boys. His schedule is complicated, so he appreciates being able to pop into the coffee shop on Wednesdays as his schedule allows to talk with his pastor about church projects he's working on.

By committing to this weekly practice, Thompson has also established a consistent presence in the community square. When she's not in conversation, she embraces the opportunity to keep watch from the coffee shop's front window, open to what God is doing and how God might show up.

While the book contains many inspiring stories of creativity in congregational life, its emphasis—as the title *Sacred Habits* implies—is on personal and communal spiritual practices. In this respect, I found the book less helpful. Many of the essays encourage clergy to attend to practices such as writing a rule of life, forming a clergy group, taking a sabbatical, and seeking spiritual direction. The premise is that creativity often emerges from such practices. It's a solid premise, but I don't find it particularly novel.

The chapters focusing on spiritual practices may be useful to those who aren't yet convinced that creative ideas can emerge from times of “doing nothing,” meditating on scripture, and practicing the simple art of being present. But if you're seeking a source of creative stimulation, focus on the essays that tell the stories of experiments in congregational ministry.

BookMarks

Why I Left, Why I Stayed: Conversations on Christianity between an Evangelical Father and His Humanist Son

By Tony Campolo and Bart Campolo
HarperOne, 176 pp., \$24.99

Bart Campolo left the Christian faith in sorrow, not anger. Now a humanist chaplain, Bart tells his deconversion story in alternating chapters while his father, Tony Campolo, the well-known evangelical speaker, uses his essays to reassert his faith in Jesus as savior. Bart invokes Darwin and tells of the joy he found embracing earthly life as the only one there is; Tony retells his faith story and argues that “humanism doesn't work without Jesus.” The cordial conversation is poignant at a few places, but the essays follow well-worn grooves of debate. Concerned about justifying their positions, the authors don't press each other or themselves very deeply. As a result, their exchanges pass each other like ships in the night.

The Church Cannot Remain Silent: Unpublished Letters and Other Writings

By Oscar Romero, translated by Gene
Palumbo and Dinah Livingstone
Orbis Books, 144 pp., \$20.00 paperback

Writing of the “economic, political, and cultural marginalization” in his country, Oscar Romero claims: “The church cannot remain silent in the face of such misery, for to do so would be to betray the gospel.” As archbishop of San Salvador in the 1970s, Romero observed instances of torture, disappearances, false imprisonments, and assassinations. This book of brief excerpts from his personal letters and final two sermons covers a broad range of themes, from the suffering of farmworkers to “the conjugal act between legitimate spouses.” Underneath his words is a persistent faithfulness, rooted in the gospel and grounded in communal worship: “The risen Christ is our hope.”

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Avoiding white moral infantilism

James Baldwin, the American essayist and novelist, who died in 1987, believed that American popular media blinded white Americans to the violent, oppressive racial reality that lived beside them. The America of pop culture was “so fat and so sleek, and so safe, and so happy” but also, in Baldwin’s scathing diagnosis, “so irresponsible, and so dead.” He argued that for most white Americans, black life remained opaque. People of color, if seen at all, were reduced to a racial “problem,” not as full human subjects. His own fiction was meant to challenge this opacity.

But many current films and television shows are offering complex characters of color and analyzing race in ways that Baldwin assumed was impossible for pop culture. The revolution may not be televised, and it certainly won’t happen because we are all watching TV, but for those wishing to avoid white moral infantilism, here are some excellent places to start:

1) *I Am Not Your Negro*: Raoul Peck’s documentary about Baldwin is compiled entirely from Baldwin’s published and unpublished writing, especially the notes for his unfinished book on the lives and deaths of Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. Spoken over images of Ferguson in 2014, white supremacist rallies in the 1950s, clips from sugar-coated white pop culture, and images of the deaths of black Americans past and present, Baldwin’s words are as prophetic now as they were when he wrote them.

2) *13th*: After Baldwin and Peck’s persuasive case for the fragility of “racial progress,” Ava DuVernay’s documentary about the prison industrial complex fills in the missing pieces of the story. Drawing

extensively from Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander is one of many scholars interviewed), the film traces the rise of mass incarceration from the end of the Civil War to the present, laying out damning evidence of the persistence of structural racism.

3) *O.J.: Made in America*: About so much more than O.J. Simpson, Ezra Edelman’s five-part documentary is a master class on race, masculinity, sports culture, pop culture, police practices, real estate zoning, informal segregation, domestic violence, and celebrity culture. It beat out both *13th* and *I Am Not Your Negro* to win the documentary feature Oscar this year. If you watch the three films in succession, you won’t be able to claim that you don’t understand how structural racism works or don’t know what people mean by a culture of white supremacy.

4) *Moonlight*: Primed with historical, philosophical, legal, and cultural analysis, it’s time to turn to fiction, and there is no better place to start than with the winner

of this year’s Academy Award for Best Picture, not least because it focuses entirely on black lives. There is not a single white character in Barry Jenkins’s film. This choice may be as radical as the film’s portrayal of black queer sexuality. It is a visually stunning meditation on character, friendship, and inner life. Structural racism shapes the limits of Chiron’s life (Alex Hibbert, Ashton Sanders, and Trevante Rhodes play Chiron at different stages of his life), but the story focuses on his human particularity.

5) *Get Out*: The directorial debut of Jordan Peele (part of the comedy team Key and Peele) is a pitch-perfect satire-horror film about Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), a black man who goes to the country to meet the family of his white girlfriend, Rose (Allison Williams). Think *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* meets *Rosemary’s Baby*. The instinctive anxiety that Chris feels in a mostly white, affluent environment becomes the basis of an actual horror plot. You will laugh (far



PHOTO BY JUSTIN LUBIN / © UNIVERSAL PICTURES

SCARY: Chris (Daniel Kaluuya, center) meets his girlfriend’s family in Jordan Peele’s satirical horror film *Get Out*.

The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University.

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more than expected for a horror movie), cringe, shriek, and recoil, all while slowly realizing that the outlandish plot is horrifyingly close to the racism that people of color face every day, in softer liberal forms and in long-standing structural ones.

6) *Fences*: Produced by and starring Denzel Washington, this film of August Wilson's play could fit alongside other historical dramas of the year (like *Loving* and *Hidden Figures*), but Wilson's work deserves a slot of its own. One of America's great playwrights, Wilson wrote *Fences* as the sixth play in his ten-play series about African-American life in Pittsburgh. Digging deep into the inner lives of its characters, their relationships, and the dramas of ordinary life, it is a character-driven masterpiece. Washington's adaptation, which reassembles much of the cast from the 2010 Broadway revival, has been criticized for being too much a stage production put on film, but I am not sure this is a weakness. Many Americans will never get to see a Wilson play on stage, and this film offers a remedy for that.

7) *Atlanta*: Donald Glover's television series *Atlanta* is a unique blend of comedy and drama. It follows two cousins through Atlanta's hip-hop scene. In this golden age of television, it is also one of the first prestige shows to focus entirely on black characters with the same range and depth that pretty much all other prestige TV has focused on white characters. For the simple act of making the humanity of people of color less opaque, it should be required viewing. Before you know it, you will be debating the politics of rap and questioning the romantic plots, proving that watching great television never feels like a moral duty.

8) *Represent*: Technically this is not something to watch but to listen to. Aisha Harris's *Slate* podcast includes guest appearances by creative professionals involved in the films listed above, as well as episodes that press diversity beyond black/white to topics such as Holocaust humor, with Ferne Pearlstein, the director of the new documentary *The Last Laugh*, and an interview with Puerto Rican-American actress Rita Moreno. It's a sophisticated, world-opening exploration of the representation of race (and gender, sexuality, and ethnic diversity) in pop culture.

by Philip Jenkins

notes from the GLOBAL CHURCH

French Catholics speak up

Something quite unexpected is happening in France: in what has long been regarded as one of the world's most secular societies, Catholics are now re-emerging as a potent force in public life.

For many years, French Catholicism has repeatedly been the subject of depressing news stories. Vocations are in sharp decline, and barely half of French people are willing to claim even a notional Catholic identity. In religious terms, the country seemed destined for total secularization, or alternatively, perhaps some kind of Islamization.

How surprising, then, over the past couple of years to see the French media proclaiming the return of *les Cathos*. An early token of change was the mass movement formed to protest proposed legislation of same-sex marriages. That new law promised *le mariage pour tous* (marriage for all), to which Catholic protesters responded with *La Manif pour tous* (The Demonstration for All). *La Manif* drew many thousands to its protests, drawing comparisons to the Tea Party in the United States.

Still more remarkable is the role of Catholic belief in the current presidential election. The initial favorite in this contest was center-right candidate François Fillon, who explicitly proclaimed his Christian faith. But Fillon is not alone. As a stunned *Nouvel Observateur* asked, reporting on the five leading

contenders for the presidency—from the far right to the far left—“Why the devil are all the candidates Cathos?”

Survey evidence also forced some rethinking about the scale of that Catholic presence. The familiar assumption has long been that French Catholics are overwhelmingly lukewarm or nominal in their faith. They are *Cathos culturels*. The number of *pratiquants* or practicing believers is tiny, basically the 5 percent or so of the population who attend Sunday mass regularly. But major surveys now move away from using that Sunday mass criterion and look instead at the number of believers who identify with church life and teachings. By these standards, about a quarter of the French population, some 16 million people, count as *Catholiques engagés*, being significantly involved or engaged with the church.

Many shades of belief and practice exist within that broad grouping, but a sizable minority are strikingly conservative and devout. Some favor traditional liturgy and might be inspired by charismatic movements like the Emmanuel Community and revived pilgrimage sites such as Paray-le-Monial. Age is actually a good predictor of loyalties, as younger Catholics—especially among clergy—are substantially more actively Catholic than are

baby boomers. Depending on circumstances, the share of people who might join the *engagés* might grow or shrink over time.

Catholic ideals and sympathies are far more widespread in the French population than has long been assumed, and that underestimate owes much to media assumptions about what journalists and academics wanted to find. Strict secularists themselves, they could hardly imagine that anyone else could take this religion stuff seriously. But in fact a very sizable Catholic interest has remained in place, politically dormant, until events brought them back to the public sphere. In terms of a submerged silent majority, and of media attitudes toward that group, it is tempting to draw resemblances to such recent events as the Brexit vote in Britain and Trump's election in the United States.

What awoke *les Cathos* from their political slumber? The same-sex marriage issue had some effect, but mainly among the hard core of faithful practitioners. Far more significant for the larger population has been the issue of Islam and its place in French life. Some believers are overtly anti-immigrant or Islamophobic, but even those who reject prejudice are disaffected by the double standard applied to Muslims and Catholics. Cath-

olics had spent decades following the rules laid down by secularism and *laïcité*, however much they resented the exclusion of Christian symbols in public places. But when Muslims forcefully asserted their religious identity, it seemed that most media outlets and many politicians accepted this as a necessary part of multiculturalism.

Long-standing resentment found a focus in one event above all, which occurred in the parish of Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray on July 26, 2016. On that day, two Muslim jihadists claiming loyalty to ISIL attacked the church and cut the throat of the 86-year-old priest, Jacques Hamel. A broad range of Christians (and non-Christians) immediately declared Father Hamel a martyr, and he is soon likely to be canonized. Beyond the horrible quality of the particular act, the murder drew attention to the frequency of Islamist attacks on French churches, few of which received media coverage at the time. Last Christmas, French authorities went on high alert in the expectation of other assaults on churches and believers.

For decades, many French Catholics have increasingly felt like exiles in their own country. Following the slaughter of Father Hamel, it was difficult to resist the language of “taking the country back.”

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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PHOTO BY MARIA FENROD

Disrupting the Cradle to Prison Pipeline, by Ndume Olatushani

During Lent, an exhibit of the Stations of the Cross in Washington, D.C., invites pilgrims to keep vigil. An app called Alight: Art and the Sacred provides maps and GPS to help the pilgrim locate stations in museums and churches, at memorials, and along streets. The first station, located across from the Supreme Court building, features *Disrupting the Cradle to Prison Pipeline*, by artist and former death row prisoner Ndume Olatushani. After serving 27 years for a murder he didn't commit, Olatushani had his sentence overturned in 2012. "I'm not claiming to be Jesus Christ, but I know what it is like to be persecuted and almost executed," says Olatushani. Using chicken wire, he molded orange prison jumpsuits into prisoners bowed and writhing in agony. A figure in a jumpsuit, seated next to two figures dressed in hoodies, represents the one in three black men who are incarcerated in the United States.

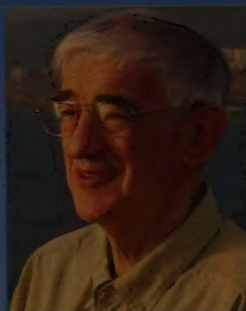
Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor.

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Tuesday / Original sin:
Sexual temptation or escalatory violence?

Wednesday / Covenantal law:
Human destiny or divine sanction?

Thursday / God's kingdom:
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Friday / Christianity's criterion:
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John Dominic Crossan is generally regarded as the leading historical Jesus scholar in the world. Educated in Ireland and the United States, he taught at DePaul University in Chicago from 1969 to 1995 and is now professor emeritus in the religious studies department. His best-selling books include *The Historical Jesus*, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, *The Birth of Christianity*, and *Who Killed Jesus?*

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